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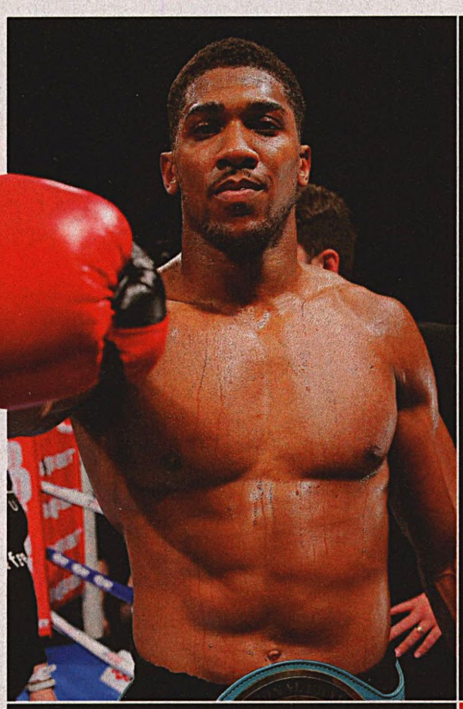

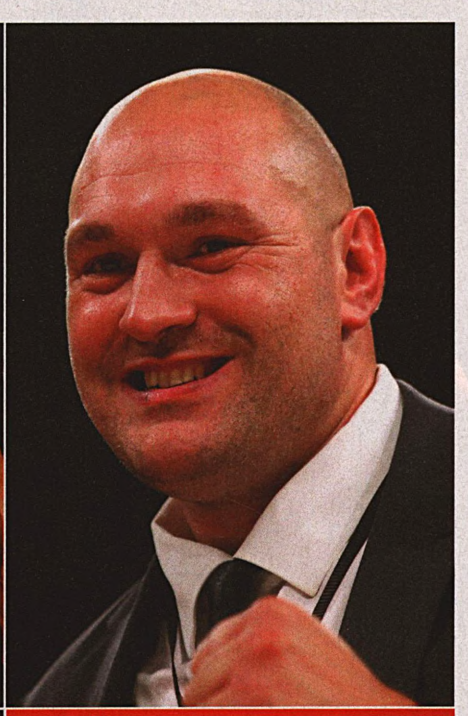

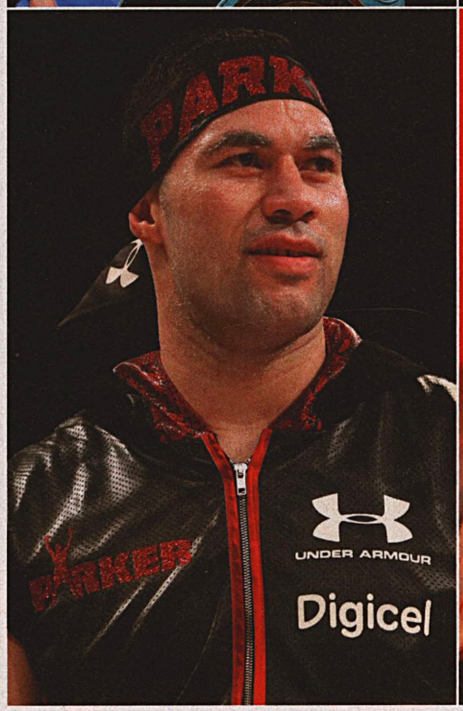

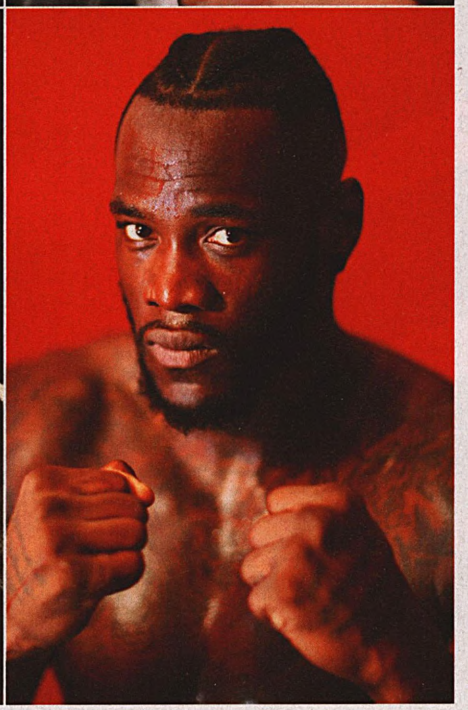

38 RISING SONS
ARE WE WITNESSING A GOLDEN ERA OF JAPANESE BOXING? MEET ITS NEW GENERATION AND DECIDE
By Doug Fischer / Anson Wainwright

46 GROUNDBREAKER
CHRISTY MARTIN'S IMPACT EXTENDS FAR BEYOND HER PUNCHES
By Thomas Gerbasi

50 BEWARE THE UNDERDOG
CALEB TRUAX'S UPSET OF JAMES DEGALE SHOCKED EVERYONE BUT HIM
By Gordon Marino

THE UNDERCARD

4 OPENING SHOT

6 COME OUT WRITING

9 RINGSIDE

10 FIGHTER OF THE MONTH

11 NEW FACES: MAXIM DADASHEV
By Mike Coppinger

12 BEST I FACED: MICHAEL MOORER
By Anson Wainwright

14 FIGHTS OF FANTASY: MUHAMMAD ALI VS. GEORGE FOREMAN II
By Tom Gray

16 RING RATINGS PACKAGE

54 FIGHT REPORTS
By Brian Harty

60 AT THE FIGHTS
By Lamar Clark

64 FROM THE ARCHIVE

66 ACROSS THE POND
By Gareth A Davies

22 BATTLE ROYALE
FOUR WOULD-BE KINGS ARE BRINGING HEAVYWEIGHTS BACK INTO THE SPOTLIGHT
By Tom Gray

28 PUNCHING BAG
DEONTAY WILDER CAN'T SEEM TO WIN WITH THE CRITICS
By Mike Coppinger

32 THE BIG SHOW
JOSHUA-PARKER WILL BE PART SPECTACLE, PART MOMENT OF TRUTH
By Gareth A Davies

36 KEEPING IT REAL
EVANDER HOLYFIELD PROMOTES THE SAME WAY HE FOUGHT: ALL IN
By Joseph Santoliquito

The four major heavyweight players (clockwise from upper left): Anthony Joshua, Tyson Fury, Deontay Wilder and Joseph Parker

JOSHUA: ANDREW COULDRIDGE/ACTION IMAGES; FURY: ALEX LIVESEY; WILDER: AL BELLO; PARKER: NICK POTTS

WBC 130-pound titleholder Miguel Berchelt made short work of late-substitute Maxwell Awuku, stopping the undeserving challenger in three rounds on February 10 in Cancun, Mexico. ★ Photo by Erick Marfil

OLD PROBLEM, NEW PROPOSAL

Isn't it time for a more radical approach to boxing's antiquated scoring system? My solution is an obvious one: an open scoring system so that we all know after every round who has won the round and what the current score is. Of course, that is nothing new as a proposal for boxing and we are all aware of the major drawback: A fighter sufficiently ahead toward the end of the fight doesn't need to win any more rounds, he merely has to survive in order to win, effectively killing the contest as a spectacle. So here's the thing – why does boxing have to be fought over 12 rounds, nine or 10 or 15 or any other number? Why not implement a "first to" system that could facilitate open scoring and impact positively in other areas? For example, let's make a fight the best of 15 rounds. If a fighter wins eight rounds, he wins the fight, regardless of how many rounds have completed. He might win 8-0, he might win 8-7. The fighter wins the round based on the unanimous or majority verdict of the three judges for that round. So what are the benefits to this? Well, I believe it would lead to more exciting fights – a fighter knowing he/she is behind will have to take a more positive approach, while a fighter ahead can take nothing for granted until he/she reaches the winning post. I also believe there are health and safety benefits: A fighter down 8-0 is probably going to take a further beating for the remaining rounds anyway. Would fans or broadcasters feel short-changed by potentially seeing fewer rounds in a "first to" system? I think they would be compensated by an improvement in the quality of fights and a generally enhanced viewer experience provided by scoring transparency.

Chris Turner
Bradford, West Yorkshire, England

Editor's Note: A "first to" system is an interesting idea, but it still doesn't address a nagging issue: incompetent judges.

CORRECTIONS: In the April issue of THE RING on page 19, Vasyl Lomachenko's knockout percentage was erroneously given as 97.4; the correct value is 73. On page 79, a caption mistakenly identified Sho Kimura as Ryoichi Taguchi.

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TWEET OF THE MONTH

Now that's a "call out." Jorge Linares issued the challenge to Vasyl Lomachenko and literally waits for the "call back."

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Winning the heavyweight championship of the world is the hardest thing you can ever do, because there's no one who can tell you about being champion of the world unless they've been there themselves.

I woke up the morning after the Joe Frazier fight and the feeling I had was like nothing I could have ever imagined. My manager couldn't tell me. My trainers couldn't tell me. It was like being on top of the world, and I haven't gotten over that yet. I woke up feeling like I had conquered the whole world.

When you face someone like Joe Frazier, who had destroyed so many big men, including Muhammad Ali, you don't think anyone can beat him. And here I am; I knocked him down six times to win the heavyweight championship. I couldn't believe it. It gave me the most magnificent feeling.

That was a very special time in heavyweight history and it was special to be on top. Outside of the champions, you had Jimmy Ellis, Floyd Patterson, Jerry Quarry, Boone Kirkman, Thad Spencer and Leotis Martin. I was surrounded with great fighters. I was training partners with Sonny Liston and sparred with him before and after I won gold at the Mexico Olympics in 1968.

As champion, I defended all over the world and there was a good reason for that. Ali and Frazier had fought for $2.5 million apiece (for their first fight) at Madison Square Garden and New York state took a huge amount of money from them in taxes. As a result, there would wouldn't be another major heavyweight championship fight at The Garden for many years.

Ali, Frazier, Norton and I had to look for other places to fight.

And purses went out to the highest bidder: Zaire, Jamaica, Venezuela, Japan. We fought everywhere and I'm so grateful for that in our era, because then we could truly say, "I am the heavyweight champion of the whole world." It would be great to see heavyweight championship fights in some of those countries again.

When I came back in 1987, my trainer, Dick Sadler, told me that he couldn't get me big money but he could teach me how to box all over again. He told me the money would come. Dick Sadler taught me how to box and I learned how to promote. I knew I could win the title back, not because of my physical strength, but because I knew every angle of how to become heavyweight champion of the world.

I knew how to start from the bottom and I didn't get intimidated because of my age. I knew if I started from the bottom and used all the things that Dick Sadler showed me, that I could be champion again. The hardest thing is to become champion once, so doing it again is pretty easy. All you have to do is what you did before.

But I was impressed with that era. Riddick Bowe? What a tiger. Evander Holyfield? He could have existed in any era. He was that good. What a champion that man has been. And then Michael Moorer beat Holyfield over 12 rounds. Lennox Lewis? He was maybe the cream of the crop. There were some really good fighters around in the '90s.

Twenty-one years after beating Joe Frazier, I woke up as champion after knocking out Michael Moorer. All I could think of was, "Boy, now I have a sermon to preach on Sunday!" I thought about all the bills I could pay off. And I thought about going to see my children and how happy they would be to see me. My family had labored through it with me, and my country had given me a second chance. I was proud of myself and I was more grateful the second time around.

When you do something historical like that, it's just waiting there for someone to come up and say, "I can do that!" I would be happy to see another fighter from the next generation win the heavyweight championship at 60 years old. That's what life is all about. Things have to get better and better and better.

ROUND 1

FIGHTER OF THE MONTH ★ NEW FACES ★ AND MORE!

FIGHTER OF THE MONTH

ERROL SPENCE JR. sits behind Keith Thurman in THE RING's welterweight rankings. Thurman holds the No. 1 spot on the strength of a body of work that has earned him two world titles. But in the court of public opinion, Spence is "the man" and future star of the 147-pound division. His seventh-round stoppage of veteran Lamont Peterson bolstered this belief. The fact that Spence (who was a 25-1 favorite to beat Peterson) won did not excite fans. Thurman wins fights – his last two by close decisions – and then takes long breaks. Spence doesn't just win. He destroys his opposition with brutal technical efficiency and then he challenges the world. That's why he has a spot in the pound-for-pound rankings (No. 8) and Thurman does not.

ADVANCED DEGREES

Degrees of separation between fighters of the past and their more contemporary counterparts. In honor of guest editor George Foreman – who was born in Marshall, Texas, in 1949 – regular contributor Gregg Morgan links Big George with the first Texan-by-birth heavyweight champion, Jack Johnson, who was born in Galveston in 1878. Johnson seized the throne with his color barrier-smashing win over Tommy Burns in 1908, while Foreman would repeat the feat 64 years later with his second-round stoppage of Joe Frazier in Jamaica. It only took five steps:

Jack Johnson
fought

Brad Simmons
who fought

Ham Pounder
who fought

Archie Moore
who fought

Muhammad Ali
who fought

George Foreman

NEW FACES

MAXIM DADASHEV

BY MIKE COPPINGER

Maxim Dadashev was ready to trek to the United States and pursue his dream of becoming a world champion. His flight from St. Petersburg, Russia, to Los Angeles was booked. His arrangements were completed. Soon, he would be headed for a new life.

Dadashev was a successful amateur in Russia, mostly as a kickboxer. And that was the problem.

It was 5:00 a.m., just four days before his scheduled departure, when there was a boisterous knock that woke him and his wife, Elizabeth, who was three months pregnant. "Open the door, we know you're here!" The police, shotguns in hand, were at Dadashev's home.

Marijuana was found, according to the authorities, but Dadashev says it was planted there that very morning. He was transported to the St. Petersburg Police station, and after he was shaken down for 3,123,225 rubles ($55,000 in U.S. currency), Dadashev was released through the help of his attorney.

Now a free man, Dadashev knew he couldn't wait four more days to leave Russia. The St. Petersburg Amateur Federation was behind the arrest, he was sure.

Dadashev failed to qualify for the 2016 Olympics in Rio, but he suspects the Federation fixed the fight so that he'd have to stay in Russia and wait for the 2020 Games.

"It is fucking crazy," Dadashev told THE RING at his manager Egis Klimas' Boxing Laboratory gym in Oxnard, California. "(The Federation said), 'Don't go to America, please stay here.' I told (them), 'No, please, I'm going to America.'"

So Dadashev moved his flight up a day to February 15, 2016. He also changed his departure to the Moscow airport, an eight-hour drive away, fearful that he would never be allowed to board a plane in his hometown.

He paid the rideshare driver $100, and soon he was on his way (his wife would join him in the U.S. four months later). Klimas' friend Daniel picked up Dadashev, and the fighter settled in Oxnard, where most of the accomplished manager's fighters live and train.

Dadashev (9-0, 8 knockouts) signed with Top Rank, made his pro debut two months later, and everything has gone swimmingly since. He scored the biggest win of his career in November, a fourth-round knockout of former hot prospect Clarence Booth.

Now the junior welterweight has graduated to 10-round fights, and soon enough he'll be ready for a title shot.

"He's always been a pretty crafty guy who knows how to use his reach, and he can crack," said Dadashev's trainer, Marco Contreras. "If you look at him, you'll say, 'Oh, this is a malnourished guy,' and then boom, he knocks the guy out and everyone is like, 'Oh shit, where did that come from?'

"I know he's beat up the guys he's matched up with right now, but Max needs to step up to a fight where it's 50-50 and see how he looks and then we'll leave him to the sharks."

But both Dadashev and Contreras believe he's ready right now for fellow Top Rank 140-pounders like Jose Ramirez and Alex Saucedo. "I'm better than them," he said. Top Rank matchmaker Brad Goodman calls Dadashev one of the promotional company's top prospects.

"We're very high on him," Goodman said. "I don't see any reason why he can't win a world title at 140. And I say that with a lot of confidence. I think he can hold his own right now with anybody at 140."

Dadashev, who is scheduled to fight seasoned Mexican scrapper Abdiel Ramierz (23-2-1, 21 KOs) on the March 10 Oscar Valdez-Scott Quigg undercard, hopes to prove it to the world with a fight on ESPN in 2018. And his ultimate goal is a lofty one: to claim all four junior welterweight titles.

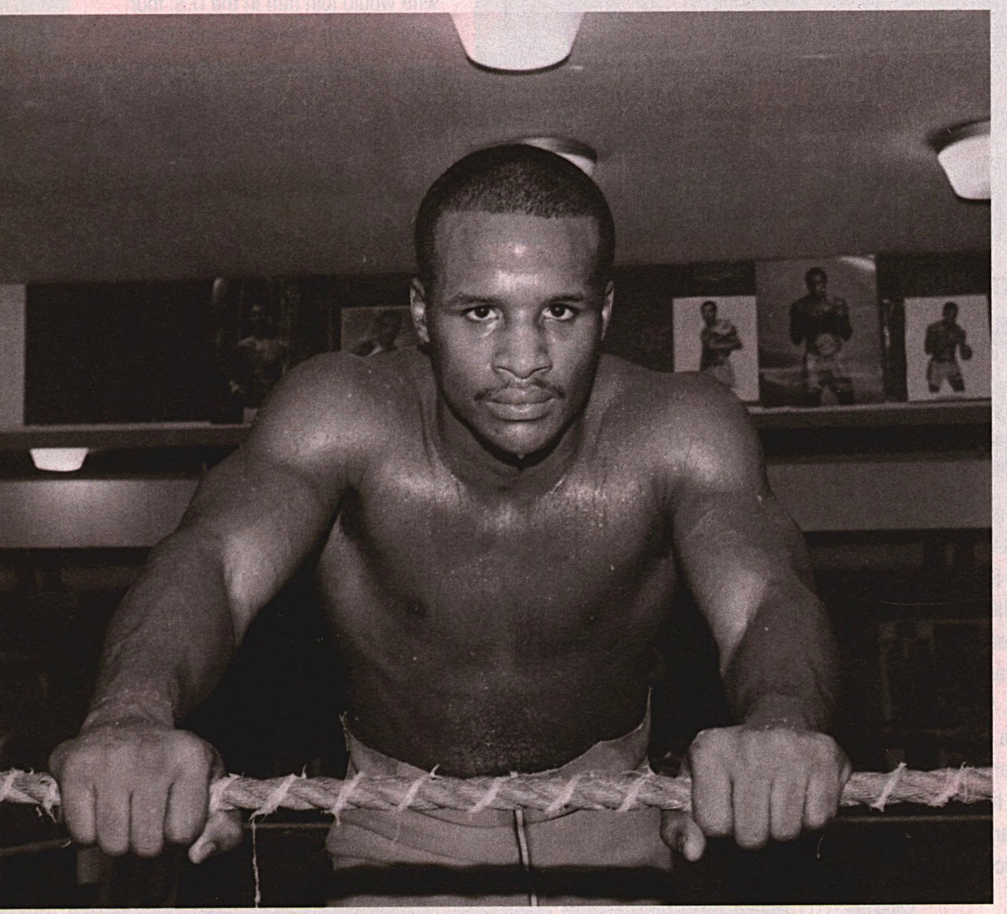
"My dream in boxing is to win all four titles – unification," said the 27-year-old, who takes English classes two hours a day, four times a week. "I want one title, then a second title, then a third and fourth.

"I don't fight like monster – like go forward, punch, punch. I can move, I can go back. I can do side moves. ... I don't have fear. I'm not scared of anyone."

After all he's been through just to make it here, why would he be?

BEST I FACED

BY ANSON WAINWRIGHT



MICHAEL MOORER

52-4-1 (40 KOs)

Throughout the 1990s, Michael Moorer was thought of as one of the top heavyweights in the world. During this time, he had the rare distinction of holding the heavyweight title three times.

Moorer was born in Brooklyn but moved to Monessen, Pennsylvania, near Pittsburgh, when he was 5 years old. One of six children, he was introduced to boxing by his grandfather at the age of 10 and quickly found a passion for the sport.

Moorer represented America internationally as an amateur, posting a record of 48-16 before making the transition into the professional ranks in 1988, and within just nine months he had won the inaugural WBO light heavyweight title. Over a two-year period, he retained the title nine times, all by stoppage.

However, Moorer was struggling with making weight and made the decision to campaign at heavyweight.

After half a dozen fights, he met Bert Cooper for the vacant WBO belt. The pair exchanged knockdowns in a shootout before Moorer prevailed to become the first southpaw heavyweight titleholder, as well as one of only four men – alongside Bob Fitzsimmons, Michael Spinks and Roy Jones Jr. – to have won light heavyweight and heavyweight belts.

At that point, the WBO wasn't as well-known as the other titles, and Moorer vacated to go in search of more prestigious honors.

In the spring of 1994, Moorer recovered from a second-round trip to the canvas to win a majority decision against unified heavyweight champion Evander Holyfield. He had reached the pinnacle.

"That was the proudest (moment of my career) because so many more people saw that than when I fought Bert Cooper," Moorer told THE RING. "There was so many people there. He was the lineal champion."

In his first defense, Moorer built a sizeable lead and had the fight well in hand before he was stunningly stopped by George Foreman in the 10th round.

Several months later, however, he traveled to Germany to fight Axel Schulz for the vacant IBF title that Foreman had vacated. Moorer won a split decision to capture his third heavyweight belt.

After two defenses, he was stopped in a rematch against Holyfield and retired for three years. He returned and fought until 2008, a stretch that included a

Michael Moorer made history during an accomplished professional career.

30-second loss to David Tua and a ninth-round stoppage victory over Vassiliy Jirov, but was unable to win another title.

It was a successful career, but Moorer feels he's the exception and that boxing should do a better job of taking care of its own through some sort of pension fund.

"Fighters are never taken care of; fighters are taken advantage of from the first fight," he said passionately. "I don't understand the game of boxing, how so much money is generated but so many boxers come up broke. Something has to change. I think the United States government needs to get a boxing diplomat and put the rules and regulations out for everybody. I would like to be that person."

Moorer acknowledges he wasn't the most approachable of people in the past but says he has mellowed with age. He hopes that his in-ring persona doesn't detract from his achievements, and that one day he is able to make it into the International Boxing Hall of Fame.

"If someone in boxing doesn't like you, that carries on," he explained. "When I was a boxer, I was nasty, rude, ignorant and cocky and I had to be that way because back in those days, being a boxer you were the man. You were in the hurt business. Boxing is not for the kind-hearted, but boxing is for the badass. I don't bite my tongue. And me not being fake, that's the way I grew up – and I think that hurt me. Aren't we supposed to give people second chances in life? So why hold a grudge when you give other people opportunities to make themselves better?"

Moorer, now 50, lives in Florida and enjoys family life with his four children. He has been a private investigator for over a decade but remains involved in boxing, working with several clients.

He graciously took time to speak to THE RING about the best he fought in 10 key categories.

BEST JAB

Vassiliy Jirov: The reason for this is because of the European style that he had. He knew how to fight a southpaw – as he was a southpaw – so he was always ready with his jab for a right-hander or a left-hander.

BEST DEFENSE

George Foreman: George was hard to hit clean. He had those long, big arms. It was hard to get a real flush shot on him because his defense was pushing, extending his arms, and you had to get by that.

FASTEST HANDS

Bert Cooper: They would come into the fight thinking they had good handspeed, but fighting a southpaw you're not going to be able to get the punches off like you normally can. I think I always had the advantage because I was quicker than they were. I would say, from who I faced … Bert Cooper. He had some fast hands.

FASTEST FEET

Leslie Stewart: He was a superb boxer and always presented problems for me. That was the first time I encountered a boxer. He moved well and he knew how to fight a southpaw.

BEST CHIN

Frans Botha: Foreman took a lot of good shots; I was like, "What the hell have I got to hit him with?" But it had to be Francois Botha. He was taking some really clean shots from me, which were not fazing him. It was like he was in a trance. Mills Lane finally thought it was enough and stopped the fight in the 12th round.

SMARTEST

Evander Holyfield: Oh, Evander. Every time he fought someone a second time, he was better, except maybe against Lennox Lewis. He was a student of the game and then he perfected it. I've always respected his smarts.

STRONGEST

Cooper: I was always strong, so I never felt anyone was stronger than I was. I'm thinking Bert Cooper because that was probably my first battle, and to do something like that … he was coming at me hard. I would say him. I knew after how to adapt or how to adjust. He was strong in that fight.

BEST PUNCHER

David Tua: There was a lot of big punchers. Francois Botha hit hard. Foreman hit hard – at that time he caught me with a good punch. Holyfield hit hard. Anyone, if they get hit the right way, will go. Tua knew how to deliver the power, being more flatfooted than being on his toes and being that he kept a fist. Most boxers keep their hands open, and he knew the way he came in – short, stocky – and he had a good chin, but he could do the hitting as well.

BOXING SKILLS

Holyfield: I would have to say Evander. Evander was always going to have the best skills over the majority of the boxers because of his pedigree. He knew how to box, he knew how to punch and he knew how to fight. I would say he was the best boxer because he adapted, he made the adjustments. He was a pro. He knew what to do and how to do it.

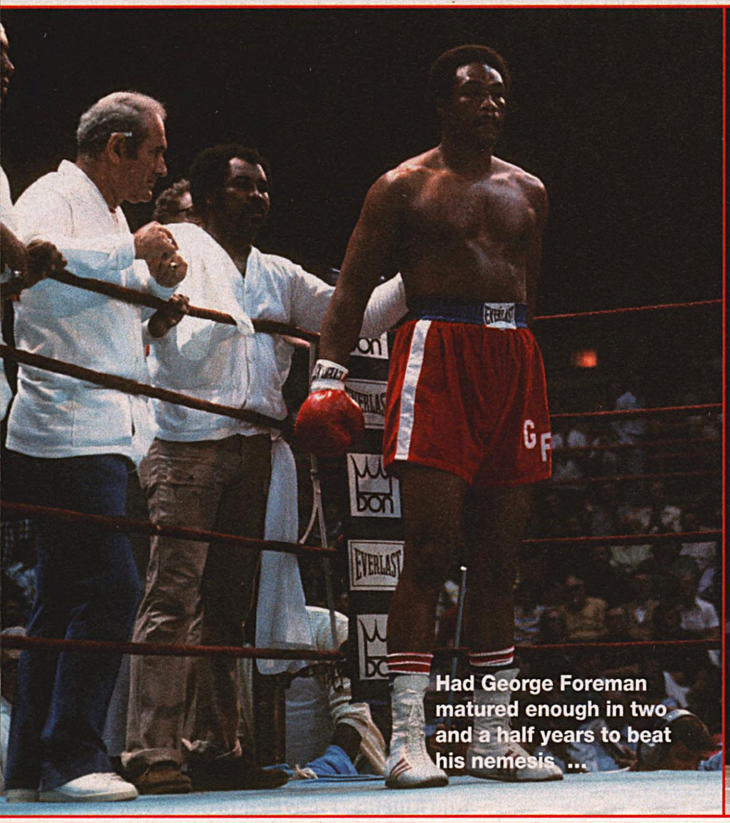
BEST OVERALL

Holyfield: I feel that Evander was the best that I faced, because he was always at his peak. When you are at your peak, you are always ready for everything and anything that is put before you. Evander always came ready. So I feel that he would have to be the best one that I fought, because he would always get himself in the best shape possible for any fight. He was always that guy. If he did not beat you the first time, he would beat you the second time.

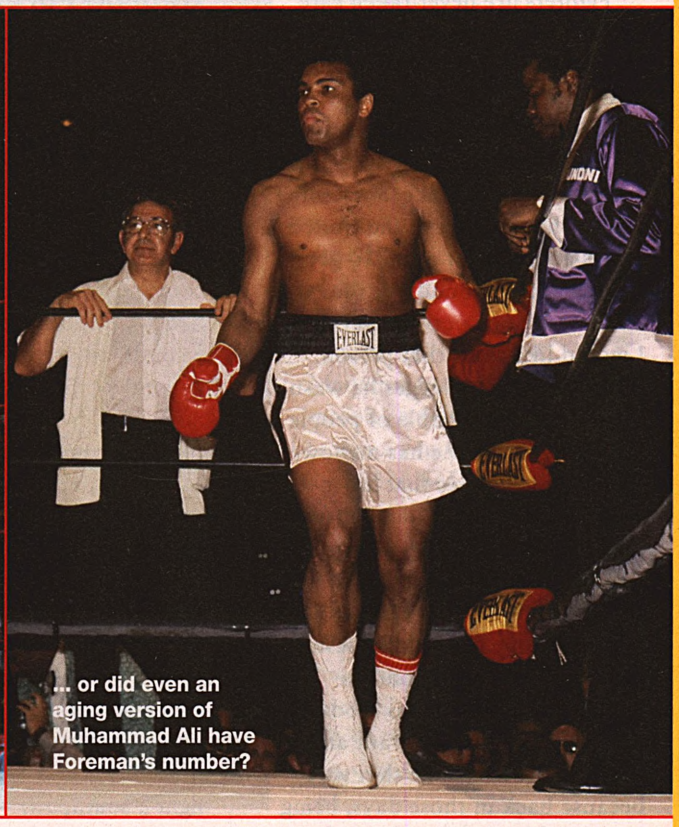
Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk and you can follow him on Twitter @AnsonWainwright.

FIGHTS OF FANTASY

BY TOM GRAY



Had George Foreman matured enough in two and a half years to beat his nemesis ...



... or did even an aging version of Muhammad Ali have Foreman's number?

MUHAMMAD ALI VS. GEORGE FOREMAN II

THREE EXPERTS – A FIGHTER, A TRAINER AND A MEDIA MEMBER – TELL YOU HOW A MYTHICAL MATCHUP WOULD PLAY OUT

It's early 1977.

Former heavyweight champion of the world George Foreman is on a five-fight win streak after losing his title to Muhammad Ali via eighth-round knockout in the epic "Rumble in the Jungle" on October 30, 1974, in Kinshasa, Zaire.

Since that stunning setback, Foreman has knocked out Ron Lyle in one of heavyweight history's greatest slugfests. The giant Texan has also bludgeoned former champion Joe Frazier to a fifth-round stoppage in a rematch and swept aside Scott LeDoux, John Dino Dennis and Pedro Agosto with ease.

Meanwhile, Ali has made eight successful title defenses since dethroning Foreman and he's the most celebrated fighter and athlete on the planet. Since regaining the crown, "The Greatest" has sealed trilogies against Frazier and Ken Norton and now has one eye on a rematch with Foreman.

Of course, it was not to be. Slick Philadelphia technician Jimmy Young defeated Foreman on points in March 1977 and the former champion subsequently retired. By the time the power-punching Texan returned to the game, 10 years later, there was a new era of heavyweights to contend with.

But what if Ali-Foreman II had happened?

This time the venue is Madison Square Garden in New York. The ropes are a lot tighter than they were in Africa. The rope-a-dope is no longer a secret. Foreman, just past his 28th birthday, is still the same ruthless puncher that he ever was. Ali, at 35, is in decline, as evidenced by his controversial decision over Norton in their rubber match.

Three experts decide: Would this fantasy-based rematch have been repeat or revenge?

Tom Gray is Associate Editor for THE RING. Follow him on Twitter: @Tom_Gray_Boxing

TWITTER POLL: WHO WINS? ALI 62% ★ FOREMAN 38% (812 VOTES)

ALI ★ TALE OF THE TAPE ★ FOREMAN

HEAVYWEIGHT

ALI		FOREMAN
35	AGE	28
53-2 (37 KOS)	RECORD	45-1 (42 KOS)
70 PERCENT	KO PERCENTAGE	93 PERCENT
ORTHODOX	STANCE	ORTHODOX
6 FEET 3 INCHES (190.5 CM)	HEIGHT	6 FEET 3 INCHES (190.5 CM)
78 INCHES (198 CM)	REACH	78 ½ INCHES (199 CM)

FIGHTER:

LARRY HOLMES

Former heavyweight champion of the world

Ali wins again. He's a better boxer. He takes a better punch. It's Ali all the way. Why do you think George Foreman wouldn't fight me? He doesn't like technical boxers. If you go in and trade with him, like Joe Frazier did, you're gonna lose. Foreman is a puncher. He'd knock out Frazier and Mike Tyson, guys who stand their ground, but Ali was about hitting and not being hit. Staying pretty. In the first fight, Ali did what he wanted to do because George believed in his own hype and thought he could just blow Ali away. He couldn't, and Ali was better on the night. The loose ropes had nothing to do with it. Don't get me wrong, Ali wasn't the same fighter in 1977. I was getting the better of him in sparring before I left his training camp in 1975. But with Foreman, all Ali had to do is avoid big punches and stay away. He would use the ropes, take everything Foreman had and come back firing. And let me tell you something ... Ali knocked him out the first time, right? Once you've knocked a man out the first time, you'll knock him out the second time. George Foreman couldn't beat Muhammad Ali.

Prediction: ALI

TRAINER:

STEPHEN EDWARDS

Trainer of jr. middleweight contender Julian Williams

Ali's win over Foreman in "The Rumble in the Jungle" is possibly the best victory in the history of boxing. If Ali doesn't win that fight, there's nobody to beat Foreman for eight or nine years, except maybe Holmes. But I think the Foreman fight and "The Thrilla in Manila" took everything Ali had. He was never the same fighter after 1975 and struggled to beat Earnie Shavers and Jimmy Young. Foreman lost to Young, but I think that was more down to George being mentally spent than Young being a better fighter. Ali was pretty much shot by 1977 and I would pick Foreman to win the rematch for that reason. But I would never pick Ali to lose a fight by knockout. His character and pain threshold were just so high. I know a few of his former sparring partners and I know what he put his body through in order to take those shots. Ali also knew how to ride punches very well. I just think Foreman would be a little too fresh for him in 1977 and, in my opinion, Ali was in the early stages of Parkinson's by that time. He was a shell of himself physically, and come 1978, he could barely get past Leon Spinks.

Prediction: FOREMAN

MEDIA:

ALAN HUBBARD

Sports columnist for the Independent on Sunday

I covered the original fight for the United Newspapers Group and I was also editor of Sportsworld Magazine at the time. The British press actually arrived in Africa on the day Foreman was cut in sparring and we had to go home and come back when a new date was announced. That wondrous night when Ali and Foreman rumbled in the Zaire jungle was the most bizarre yet exhilarating experience I have had in over half a century of sports journalism. I think Ali would win a rematch because he had better ring craft and few heavyweights could take a punch as well as he did. In 1977, Ali took murderous punches from Shavers and it's no wonder that (Ali's personal physician) Ferdie Pacheco left the camp after that fight. However, I still think that Ali would have found a way to mesmerize George – just like he did in Zaire, but in a different way. This time, Ali would probably have jabbed more than he did in their first fight. George was still punching extremely hard, but I don't think he would have caught up with Ali in a return fight. I doubt Ali knocks Foreman out in a rematch, but I think he would have outpointed him.

Prediction: ALI

Tale of the Tape at the time of the proposed fight.

RATINGS

POUND FOR POUND ★ RATINGS ANALYSIS ★ THE RING RATINGS

Heavyweight Adam Kownacki kept his undefeated record by stopping Iago Kiladze (pictured).

Oleksandr Usyk (right) congratulates fellow unified cruiserweight titleholder Murat Gassiev after the Russian's victory over Yunier Dorticos.

POUND FOR POUND

1 **GENNADY GOLOVKIN**
Kazakhstan • 37-0-1 (33 KOs)

2 **TERENCE CRAWFORD**
U.S. • 32-0-0 (23 KOs)

3 **VASYL LOMACHENKO**
Ukraine • 10-1-0 (8 KOs)

4 **SERGEY KOVALEV**
Russia • 31-2-1 (27 KOs)

5 **CANELO ALVAREZ**
Mexico • 49-1-2 (34 KOs)

6 **MIKEY GARCIA**
U.S. • 37-0-0 (30 KOs)

7 **NAOYA INOUE**
Japan • 15-0-0 (13 KOs)

8 **ERROL SPENCE JR.**
U.S. • 23-0-0 (20 KOs)

9 **GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX**
Cuba • 17-1-0 (11 KOs)

10 **SRISASKET SOR RUNGVISAI**
Thailand • 44-4-1 (40 KOs)

POUND FOR POUND: No change.

HEAVYWEIGHTS: Andy Ruiz Jr. (No. 7 last month) was dropped due to inactivity, which coincided with an eye-catching win for Adam Kownacki, who came in at No. 10 after icing Iago Kiladze (unrated) in Round 6. Then, in an overdue but no less painful move, THE RING stripped Tyson Fury of his championship belt due to not scheduling a fight since his November 2015 victory over Wladimir Klitschko.

CRUISERWEIGHTS: Maskim Vlasov was raised from No. 9 to No. 7 after an impressive

10th-round stoppage of Olanrewaju Durodola (unrated) on a World Boxing Super Series undercard. It also bears mentioning the changes that didn't happen, because four of the Top 5 in this division mixed it up in the WBSS (No. 1 Oleksandr Usyk, No. 2 Murat Gassiev, No. 3 Mairis Briedis and No. 5 Yunier Dorticos), but they all performed so well that everyone held their positions.

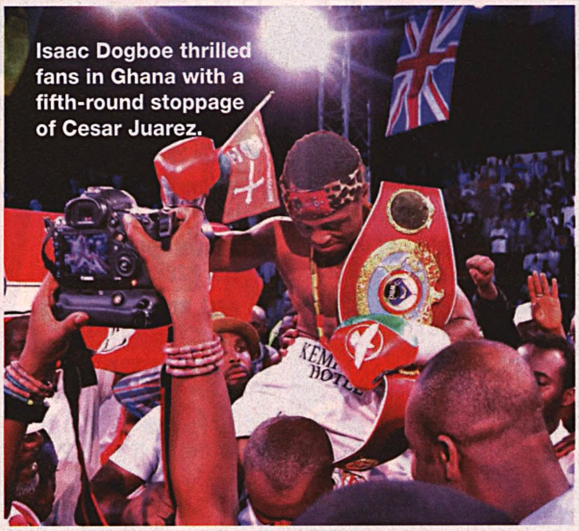
LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS: No change.

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS: No change.

MIDDLEWEIGHTS: No change.

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHTS: No change.

WELTERWEIGHTS: Lamont Peterson's corner pulled the plug after seven rounds of being dismantled by Errol Spence Jr. As a result, the D.C. native dropped from No. 6 to No. 10 while Spence maintained his position at No. 2 below Keith Thurman. Lucas Matthysse knocked out unrated Thai giant Tewa Kiram in Round 8, but the Argentine veteran's performance was worrying enough that he was lowered from No. 6 to No. 9.



Isaac Dogboe thrilled fans in Ghana with a fifth-round stoppage of Cesar Juarez.

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHTS: No change.

LIGHTWEIGHTS: No change.

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHTS: No change.

FEATHERWEIGHTS: No change.

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHTS: Undefeated Ghanaian Isaac Dogboe (No. 10 last month) pummeled No. 9-rated Cesar Juarez off the list with a fifth-round TKO and rose to No. 7. That left room at No. 10 for former bantamweight titleholder Tomoki Kameda, who left 118 after a pair of losses to Jamie McDonnell.

BANTAMWEIGHTS: No change.

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHTS: No change.

FLYWEIGHTS: Kazuto Ioka announced his retirement and left on top, vacating the No. 1 spot. With his departure, a space opened up at No. 10 for Brian Viloria. Sho Kimura (No. 9 last month) rose to No. 5 after defending his title with a ninth-round stoppage of former RING champ Toshiyuki Igarashi (unrated) – an inspiring endorsement of self-belief from somebody who started his career getting knocked out in the first round.

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHTS: Ryoichi Taguchi and Milan Melindo (Nos. 1 and 2, respectively, last month) faced off on New Year's Eve for the IBF, WBA and vacant RING championship, and it was Taguchi who left the ring with all the treasure after a unanimous-decision win. Melindo stayed at No. 2, and with Taguchi rising into the champion's berth, Rey Loreto came in at No. 10.

STRAWWEIGHTS: No. 4-rated Hiroto Kyoguchi closed out 2017 with the second defense of his IBF title and climbed a notch after an eighth-round stoppage of Carlos Buitrago, who sank from No. 6 to No. 9.★

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

C (VACANT)
1 ANTHONY JOSHUA
U.K. • 20-0-0 (20 KOs)
2 DEONTAY WILDER
U.S. • 39-0-0 (38 KOs)
3 JOSEPH PARKER
New Zealand • 24-0-0 (18 KOs)
4 ALEXANDER POVETKIN
Russia • 33-1-0 (23 KOs)
5 LUIS ORTIZ
Cuba • 28-0-0 (24 KOs)
6 KUBRAT PULEV
Bulgaria • 25-1-0 (13 KOs)
7 DILLIAN WHYTE
U.K. • 22-1-0 (16 KOs)
8 DOMINIC BREAZEALE
U.S. • 19-1-0 (17 KOs)
9 JARRELL MILLER
U.S. • 20-0-1 (18 KOS)
10 ADAM KOWNACKI
U.S. • 17-0-0 (14 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 LBS

C (VACANT)
1 OLEKSANDR USYK
Ukraine • 14-0-0 (11 KOs)
2 MURAT GASSIEV
Russia • 26-0-0 (19 KOs)
3 MAIRIS BRIEDIS
Latvia • 23-1-0 (18 KOs)
4 DENIS LEBEDEV
Russia • 30-2-0 (22 KOs)
5 YUNIER DORTICOS
Cuba • 22-1-0 (21 KOs)
6 KRZYSZTOF GLOWACKI
Poland • 28-1-0 (18 KOs
7 MAKSIM VLASOV
Russia • 42-2-0 (25 KOs)
8 ILUNGA MAKABU
Congo • 21-2-0 (20 KOs)
9 ANDREW TABITI
U.S. • 15-0-0 (12 KOs)
10 KEVIN LERENA
S. Africa • 19-1-0 (9 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 LBS

C (VACANT)
1 SERGEY KOVALEV
Russia • 31-2-1 (27 KOs)
2 ADONIS STEVENSON
Canada • 29-1-0 (24 KOs)
3 ELEIDER ALVAREZ
Colombia • 23-0-0 (11 KOs)
4 OLEKSANDR GVOZDYK
Ukraine • 14-0-0 (12 KOs)
5 ARTUR BETERBIEV
Russia • 12-0-0 (12 KOs)
6 DMITRY BIVOL
Russia • 12-0-0 (10 KOs)
7 SULLIVAN BARRERA
Cuba • 21-1-0 (14 KOs)
8 BADOU JACK
Sweden • 22-1-2 (13 KOs)
9 MARCUS BROWNE
U.S. • 21-0-0 (16 KOs)
10 JOE SMITH JR.
U.S. • 23-2-0 (19 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 LBS

C (VACANT)
1 GILBERTO RAMIREZ
Mexico • 37-0-0 (25 KOs)
2 GEORGE GROVES
U.K. • 27-3-0 (20 KOs)
3 CALLUM SMITH
U.K. • 23-0-0 (17 KOs)
4 CHRIS EUBANK JR.
U.K. • 26-1-0 (20 KOs)
5 CALEB TRUAX
U.S. • 29-3-2 (18 KOs)
6 JAMES DEGALE
U.K. • 23-2-1 (14 KOs)
7 ANDRE DIRRELL
U.S. • 26-2-0 (16 KOs)
8 ANTHONY DIRRELL
U.S. • 31-1-1 (24 KOs)
9 DAVID BENAVIDEZ
U.S. • 19-0-0 (17 KOs)
10 JUERGEN BRAEHMER
Germany • 49-3-0 (35 KOs)

RATINGS

Through fights of Feb. 4, 2018

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 LBS

C **CANELO ALVAREZ**
Mexico • 49-1-2 (34 KOs)

1 **GENNADY GOLOVKIN**
Kaz. • 37-0-1 (33 KOs)

2 **DANIEL JACOBS**
U.S. • 33-2-0 (29 KOs)

3 **BILLY JOE SAUNDERS**
U.K. • 26-0-0 (12 KOs)

4 **SERGIY DEREVYANCHENKO**
Ukraine • 11-0-0 (9 KOs)

5 **JERMALL CHARLO**
U.S. • 26-0-0 (20 KOs)

6 **DEMETRIUS ANDRADE**
U.S. • 25-0-0 (16 KOs)

7 **DAVID LEMIEUX**
Canada • 38-4-0 (33 KOs)

8 **RYOTA MURATA**
Japan • 13-1-0 (10 KOs)

9 **ANDY LEE**
Ireland • 35-3-1 (24 KOs)

10 **HASSAN N'DAM**
Cameroon • 36-3-0 (21 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 LBS

C **(VACANT)**

1 **ERISLANDY LARA**
Cuba • 25-2-2 (14 KOs)

2 **JERMELL CHARLO**
U.S. • 30-0-0 (15 KOs)

3 **JARRETT HURD**
U.S. • 21-0-0 (15 KOs)

4 **SADAM ALI**
U.S. • 26-1-0 (14 KOs)

5 **BRIAN CASTANO**
Argentina • 14-0-0 (10 KOs)

6 **LIAM SMITH**
U.K. • 26-1-1 (14 KOs)

7 **AUSTIN TROUT**
U.S. • 30-4-0 (17 KOs)

8 **MICHEL SORO**
France • 31-2-1 (21 KOs)

9 **MACIEJ SULECKI**
Poland • 26-0-0 (10 KOs)

10 **JULIAN WILLIAMS**
U.S. • 24-1-1 (15 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 LBS

C **(VACANT)**

1 **KEITH THURMAN**
U.S. • 28-0-0 (22 KOs)

2 **ERROL SPENCE**
U.S. • 23-0-0 (20 KOs)

3 **SHAWN PORTER**
U.S. • 28-2-1 (17 KOs)

4 **KELL BROOK**
U.K. • 36-2-0 (25 KOs)

5 **DANNY GARCIA**
U.S. • 33-1-0 (19 KOs)

6 **JEFF HORN**
Australia • 18-0-1 (12 KOs)

7 **MANNY PACQUIAO**
Phil. • 59-7-2 (38 KOs)

8 **JESSIE VARGAS**
U.S. • 28-2-0 (10 KOs)

9 **LUCAS MATTHYSSE**
Argentina • 39-4-0 (35 KOs)

10 **LAMONT PETERSON**
U.S. • 35-4-1 (17 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 LBS

C **TERENCE CRAWFORD**
U.S. • 32-0-0 (23 KOs)

1 **MIKEY GARCIA**
U.S. • 37-0-0 (30 KOs)

2 **VIKTOR POSTOL**
Ukraine • 29-1-0 (12 KOs)

3 **ANTONIO OROZCO**
U.S. • 26-0-0 (17 KOs)

4 **REGIS PROGRAIS**
U.S. • 20-0-0 (17 KOs)

5 **JULIUS INDONGO**
Namibia • 22-1-0 (11 KOs)

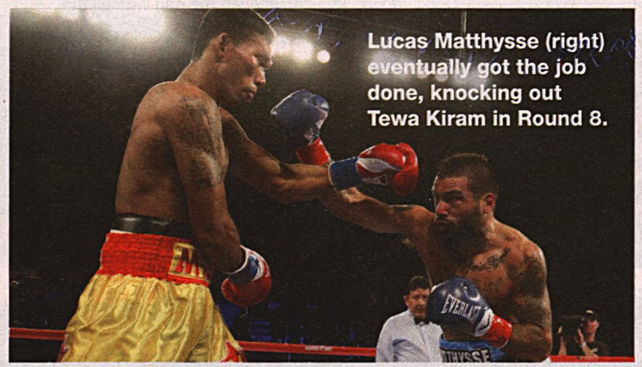
6 **EDUARD TROYANOVSKY**
Russia • 27-1-0 (24 KOs)

7 **SERGEY LIPINETS**
Russia • 13-0-0 (10 KOs)

8 **JOSH TAYLOR**
U.K. • 11-0-0 (10 KOs)

9 **RANCES BARTHELEMY**
Cuba • 26-0-0 (13 KOs)

10 **JOSE RAMIREZ**
U.S. • 21-0-0 (16 KOs)



Lucas Matthysse (right) eventually got the job done, knocking out Tewa Kiram in Round 8.

Errol Spence Jr. (right) splits Lamont Peterson's guard with a hard jab.

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 LBS

C **JORGE LINARES**
Venezuela • 44-3-0 (27 KOs)

1 **MIKEY GARCIA**
U.S. • 37-0-0 (30 KOs)

2 **ROBERT EASTER**
U.S. • 21-0-0 (14 KOs)

3 **RAYMUNDO BELTRAN**
Mexico • 34-7-1 (21 KOs)

4 **RICHARD COMMEY**
Ghana • 25-2-0 (22 KOs)

5 **ANTHONY CROLLA**
U.K. • 32-6-3 (13 KOs)

6 **FELIX VERDEJO**
Puerto Rico • 23-0-0 (15 KOs)

7 **LUKE CAMPBELL**
U.K. • 17-2-0 (14 KOs)

8 **DEJAN ZLATICANIN**
Montenegro • 23-1-0 (16 KOs)

9 **YVAN MENDY**
France • 40-4-1 (19 KOs)

10 **JAVIER FORTUNA**
Dom. Rep. • 33-2-1 (23 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 LBS

C **(VACANT)**

1 **VASYL LOMACHENKO**
Ukraine • 10-1-0 (8 KOs)

2 **MIGUEL BERCHELT**
Mexico • 32-1-0 (28 KOs)

3 **GERVONTA DAVIS**
U.S. • 19-0-0 (18 KOs)

4 **ALBERTO MACHADO**
P.R. • 19-0-0 (16 KOs

5 **FRANCISCO VARGAS**
Mexico • 24-1-2 (17 KOs)

6 **KENICHI OGAWA**
Japan • 23-1-0 (17 KOs)

7 **TEVIN FARMER**
U.S. • 25-5-1 (5 KOs)

8 **MIGUEL ROMAN**
Mexico • 58-12-0 (45 KOs)

9 **JEZREEL CORRALES**
Panama • 22-2-0 (8 KOs)

10 **JHONNY GONZALEZ**
Mexico • 65-10-0 (54 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 LBS

C **(VACANT)**

1 **LEO SANTA CRUZ**
U.S. • 34-1-1 (19 KOs)

2 **GARY RUSSELL JR.**
U.S. • 28-1-0 (17 KOs)

3 **CARL FRAMPTON**
U.K. • 24-1-0 (14 KOs)

4 **LEE SELBY**
U.K. • 26-1-0 (9 KOs)

5 **ABNER MARES**
Mexico • 31-2-1 (15 KOs)

6 **OSCAR VALDEZ**
Mexico • 23-0-0 (19 KOs)

7 **JOSEPH DIAZ JR.**
U.S. • 25-0-0 (13 KOs)

8 **SCOTT QUIGG**
U.K. • 34-1-2 (25 KOs)

9 **JESUS ROJAS**
P.R. • 26-1-2 (19 KOs)

10 **JOSH WARRINGTON**
U.K. • 26-0-0 (6 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 LBS

C **(VACANT)**

1 **GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX**
Cuba • 17-1-0 (11 KOs)

2 **JESSIE MAGDALENO**
U.S. • 25-0-0 (18 KOs)

3 **REY VARGAS**
Mexico • 31-0-0 (22 KOs)

4 **DIEGO DE LA HOYA**
Mexico • 20-0-0 (9 KOs)

5 **MOISES FLORES**
Mexico • 25-0-0 (17 KOs)

6 **DANIEL ROMAN**
U.S. • 23-2-1 (9 KOs)

7 **ISAAC DOGBOE**
Ghana • 18-0-0 (12 KOs)

8 **RYOSUKE IWASA**
Japan • 24-2-0 (16 KOs)

9 **JULIO CEJA**
Mexico • 32-2-0 (28 KOs)

10 **TOMOKI KAMEDA**
Japan • 34-2-0 (20 KOs)

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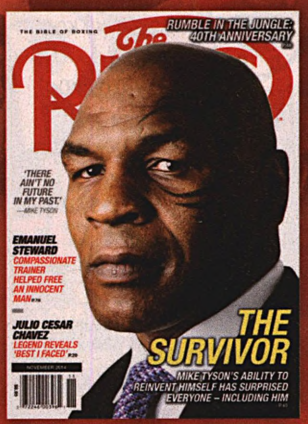

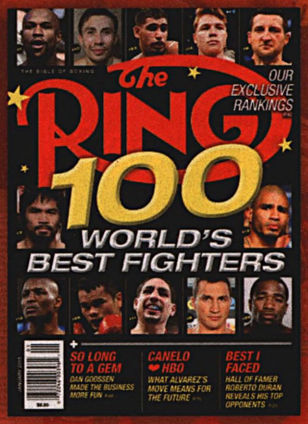

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RATINGS

Through fights of Feb. 4, 2018

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 LBS

C **SHINSUKE YAMANAKA**
Japan • 27-1-2 (19 KOs)

1 **ZOLANI TETE**
S. Africa • 26-3-0 (21 KOs)

2 **JAMIE MCDONNELL**
U.K. • 29-2-1 (13 KOs)

3 **RYAN BURNETT**
U.K. • 18-0-0 (9 KOs)

4 **JUAN CARLOS PAYANO**
Dom. Rep. • 19-1-0 (9 KOs)

5 **ZHANAT ZHAKIYANOV**
Kaz. • 27-2-0 (18 KOs)

6 **LIBORIO SOLIS**
Venezuela • 25-5-1 (11 KOs)

7 **LEE HASKINS**
U.K. • 35-4-0 (14 KOs)

8 **EMMANUEL RODRIGUEZ**
P.R. • 17-0-0 (12 KOs)

9 **PAUL BUTLER**
U.K. • 26-1-0 (14 KOs)

10 **OMAR NARVAEZ**
Argentina • 48-2-2 (25 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 LBS

C **(VACANT)**

1 **NAOYA INOUE**
Japan • 15-0-0 (13 KOs)

2 **SRISASKET SOR RUNGVISAI**
Thailand • 44-4-1 (40 KOs)

3 **JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA**
Mexico • 36-2-0 (25 KOs)

4 **CARLOS CUADRAS**
Mexico • 36-2-1 (27 KOs)

5 **KHALID YAFAI**
U.K. • 23-0-0 (14 KOs)

6 **JERWIN ANCAJAS**
Phil. • 29-1-1 (20 KOs)

7 **RAU'SHEE WARREN**
U.S. • 15-2-0 (4 KOs)

8 **ROMAN GONZALEZ**
Nicaragua • 46-2-0 (38 KOs)

9 **JONAS SULTAN**
Phil. • 14-3-0 (9 KOs)

10 **REX TSO**
China • 22-0-0 (13 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 LBS

C **(VACANT)**

1 **DONNIE NIETES**
Phil. • 40-1-4 (22 KOs)

2 **DAIGO HIGA**
Japan • 15-0-0 (15 KOs)

3 **JUAN CARLOS REVECO**
Argentina • 39-3-0 (19 KOs)

4 **MORUTI MTHALANE**
S. Africa • 35-2-0 (24 KOs)

5 **SHO KIMURA**
Japan • 16-1-2 (9 KOs)

6 **ANDREW SELBY**
U.K. • 10-0-0 (5 KOs)

7 **FRANCISCO RODRIGUEZ JR.**
Mexico • 25-4-1 (17 KOs)

8 **MASAYUKI KURODA**
Japan • 28-7-3 (16 KOs)

9 **ARTEM DALAKIAN**
Ukraine • 15-0-0 (11 KOs)

10 **BRIAN VILORIA**
U.S. • 38-5-0 (23 KOS)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 LBS

C **RYOICHI TAGUCHI**
Japan • 27-2-2 (12 KOs)

1 **KEN SHIRO**
Japan • 12-0-0 (6 KOs)

2 **MILAN MELINDO**
Phil. • 37-3-0 (13 KOs)

3 **CARLOS CANIZALES**
Venezuela • 19-0-1 (16 KOs)

4 **PEDRO GUEVARA**
Mexico • 30-3-1 (17 KOs)

5 **GANIGAN LOPEZ**
Mexico • 28-7-0 (17 KOs)

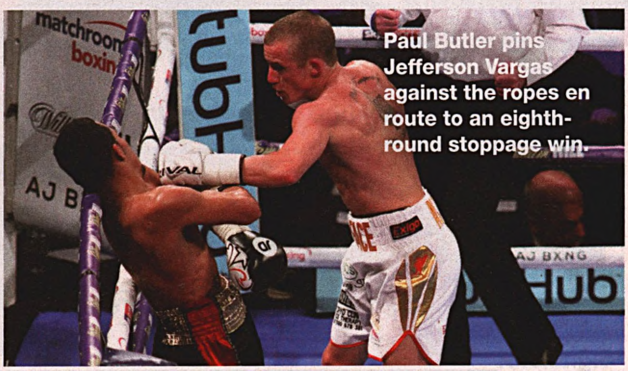
6 **HEKKIE BUDLER**
S. Africa • 31-3-0 (10 KOs)

7 **FELIX ALVARADO**
Nicaragua • 31-2-0 (27 KOs)

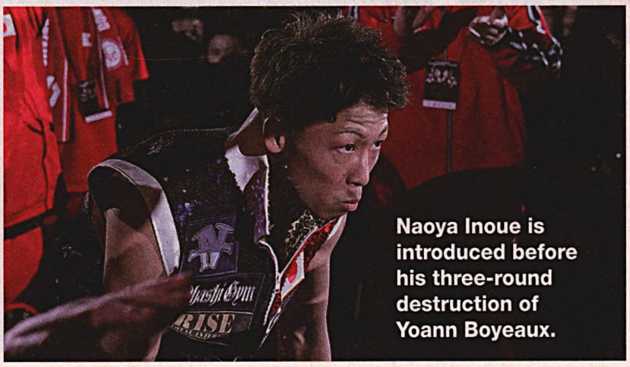
8 **AKIRA YAEGASHI**
Japan • 25-6-0 (13 KOs)

9 **ANGEL ACOSTA**
P.R. • 17-1-0 (17 KOs)

10 **REY LORETO**
Phil. • 23-14-0 (15 KOs)



Paul Butler pins Jefferson Vargas against the ropes en route to an eighth-round stoppage win.



Naoya Inoue is introduced before his three-round destruction of Yoann Boyeaux.

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 LBS

C **(VACANT)**

1 **WANHENG MENAYOTHIN**
Thailand • 49-0-0 (17 KOs)

2 **KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART**
Thailand • 16-0-0 (7 KOs)

3 **HIROTO KYOGUCHI**
Japan • 9-0-0 (7 KOs)

4 **BYRON ROJAS**
Nicaragua • 24-3-3 (10 KOs)

5 **JOSE ARGUMEDO**
Mexico • 20-4-1 (12 KOs)

6 **RYUYA YAMANAKA**
Japan • 15-2-0 (4 KOs)

7 **SIMPHIWE KHONCO**
S. Africa • 18-5-0 (7 KOs)

8 **LEROY ESTRADA**
Panama • 16-2-0 (6 KOs)

9 **CARLOS BUITRAGO**
Nicaragua • 30-3-1 (17 KOs)

10 **TATSUYA FUKUHARA**
Japan • 19-6-6 (7 KOs)

HOW OUR RATINGS ARE COMPILED
RECORDS PROVIDED BY BOXREC.COM

Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. THE RING's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the RING title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose his belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which he is champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at his championship weight for 18 months (even if he fights at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

THE RING Editorial Board considers input from the Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world and then decides collectively what changes will be made. That applies to both the pound-for-pound and divisional ratings.

THE RING POLICY ON RATED BOXERS WHO TEST POSITIVE FOR PERFORMANCE-ENHANCING DRUGS

THE RING will remove from its ratings any rated boxer — including a champion — if such boxer at some point undergoes drug testing (Olympic-style or otherwise) and that boxer tests positive for a performance-enhancing drug.

In the event that a boxer has undergone testing in which the boxer provides two samples ("A" and "B") and the boxer's "A" and subsequent "B" samples test positive for a performance-enhancing drug or if his "A" sample tests positive and he waives his right to have the "B" sample tested, then the boxer shall immediately be removed from the ratings.

A boxer whose "A" sample tested positive and is awaiting the results of his "B" sample will not be allowed to fight for a championship or rise in the ratings.

A boxer who is removed because of a positive test will have the opportunity to earn his way back into the ratings after any suspension period is completed.

A boxer who is dropped also may be reinstated if the testing agency subsequently reverses its decision or a court of competent jurisdiction finds that the test result was invalid.

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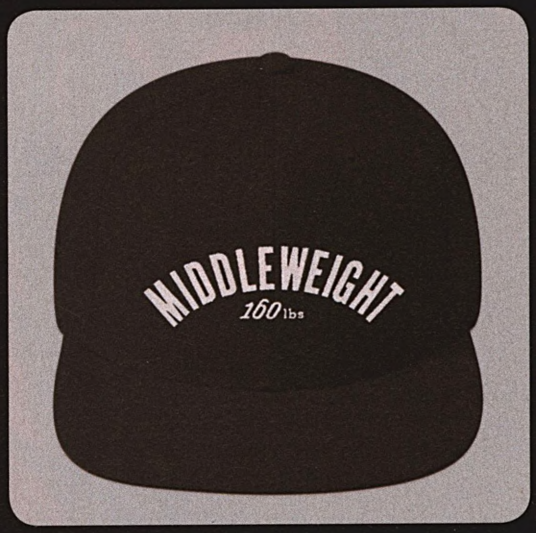

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DIGGING FOR GOLD

HEAVYWEIGHT

WITH FOUR UNBEATEN, CHARISMATIC CLAIMANTS TO THE THRONE POISED TO CLASH, CAN THE GLAMOUR DIVISION'S LUSTER FINALLY RETURN?

By **Tom Gray**

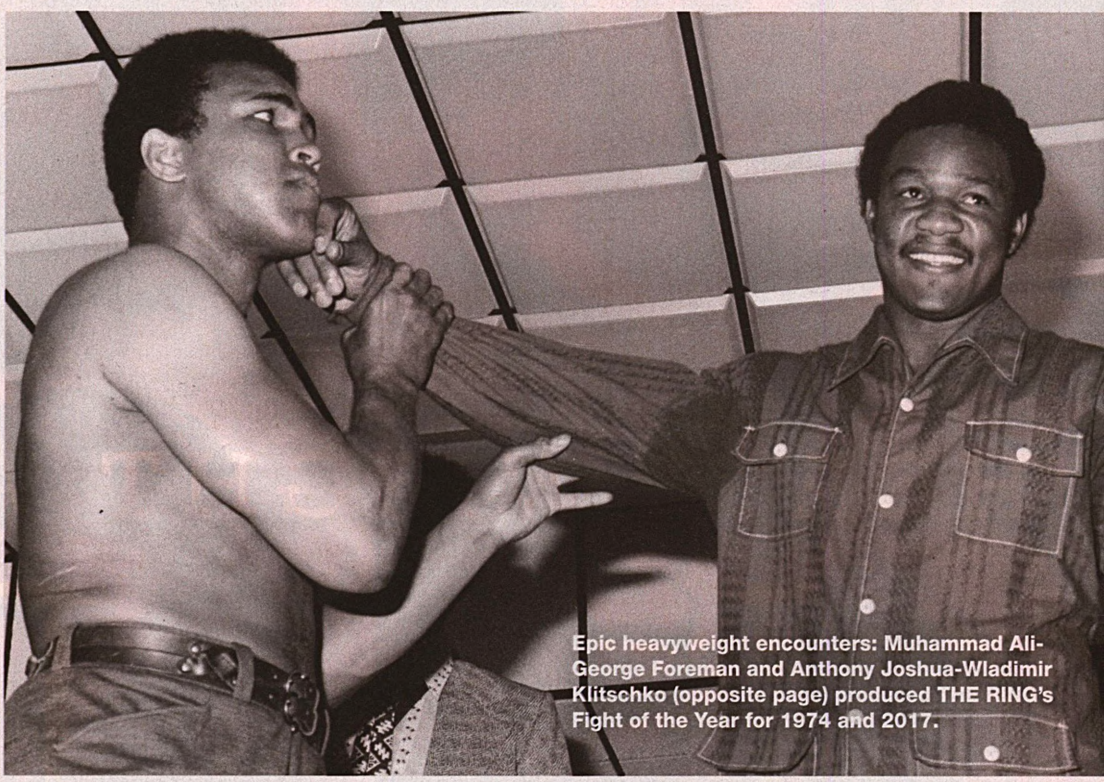
Illustration by **Patrick Killian**

The golden era at heavyweight.

If you're a post-1970s fight fan, you dream about it. When your parents or grandparents recall those times, you're immediately jealous. An older generation takes joy in reminding you that you'll never see heavyweights that good again. The "Rumble in the Jungle" and the "Thrilla in Manila" are classics of the genre – either one a boxing purist's Sistine Chapel in terms of pugilistic perfection. »

The closest you'll ever get is fight films, documentaries and books. You can visualize what it must have been like. You can absorb the sights and sounds from TV or learn the color commentary by heart. But you weren't there.

To have watched Muhammad Ali, George Foreman, Joe Frazier and Ken Norton throw down for the undisputed heavyweight championship of the world live would have been beyond special. There were no Las Vegas casinos bankrolling those events. In the early 1970s, the greatest prize in sports was contested in Jamaica, Venezuela, Zaire and the Philippines. Matchups involving these heavyweight legends set the benchmark for everything that followed, and the exotic locales only added to the splendor of the occasion. A boxing ring, two willing warriors, and the entire world came to a standstill.



Epic heavyweight encounters: Muhammad Ali-George Foreman and Anthony Joshua-Wladimir Klitschko (opposite page) produced THE RING's Fight of the Year for 1974 and 2017.

Fast-forward more than 40 years and times are vastly different. There are now four undefeated fighters who call themselves the heavyweight champion of the world. Tyson Fury retains lineal status, Anthony Joshua has unified the IBF and WBA belts, Deontay Wilder is the WBC titleholder and Joseph Parker, who faces Joshua on March 31, holds the WBO crown.

Yes, unification fights are being sought and, indeed, there's more interest surrounding the big men than there has been in years. But can this four-way rivalry come close to replicating the glory days of old? Will a new era of fight fans feel the same level of excitement that previous generations experienced when witnessing some of the greatest moments in boxing history? Is it even fair to have such lofty expectations?

"The '70s was an exceptional era because you had fighters – plural," said former two-time heavyweight champion George Foreman with understandable pride. "That was probably the best of all eras. You had so many names. Muhammad Ali could beat George Foreman on any given night. Joe Frazier and Ali could beat each other. George Foreman could beat Joe Frazier. Kenny Norton could beat Ali, and I don't think he ever really lost to him.

"Ali was the most brilliant personality of all time. Mix that in with the other champions, then add contenders like Jerry Quarry, Sonny Liston – who was coming to the end – Ron Lyle and Floyd Patterson. I was looking back at some of the contenders for the heavyweight championship at that time and it was one great name after another. There will never be a time like that again."

British writer and boxing historian Alan Hubbard has spent over half a century in sports journalism. He has covered 16 Olympic Games going back to Tokyo 1964 and will have gone full circle by the time Tokyo 2020 comes around. Hubbard's career is extraordinary but, in his own words, he labels the heavyweight title fights he covered from ringside during the 1970s as the pièce de résistance.

"If today is a golden era, then what I was covering must have been the platinum era," said Hubbard, sparking laughter. "I honestly don't think any of today's modern heavyweights – Joshua, Wilder, Fury, Parker … none of them – would have beaten Ali, Frazier, Foreman or Mike Tyson at their best.

"I just don't think the heavyweight champions of today have the quality of their predecessors. Yes, they're all unbeaten but, with one or two exceptions, they've been fighting stiffs. I suppose that happened in

the '70s too but, for me, even the stiffs were better back then. And top contenders like Lyle, George Chuvalo and Quarry could have given some of today's titleholders very good fights and perhaps even beaten them."

OK, but let's give the new breed a chance. Kathy Duva, CEO of Main Events, has been involved in professional boxing for almost four decades. When the Muhammad Ali story came to an end, the boxing world waited years for another golden era at heavyweight. When it finally arrived, Duva was right in the middle of it, working alongside such notables as Evander Holyfield, Lennox Lewis and Michael Moorer during the irresistible '90s.

Duva also promoted shows that featured two of today's heavyweight stars, Fury and Parker, in 2013 and 2014 respectively, and offered a fascinating insight into the potential she immediately recognized.

"We had Joseph and Tyson on our NBC series (which ran between 2012-2014) and I would have had Anthony Joshua and Deontay Wilder on it too, if that were possible," said Duva. "You just knew this was going to be the next generation of heavyweights. Even then, you could see it coming.

"The Klitschko brothers (Vitali and Wladimir) were tremendous, but it was difficult to make that a golden era. The two best heavyweights in the world couldn't fight each other because they were brothers. There was no serious rivalry. But I swear to you, when Tyson Fury came along, I picked him to beat Wladimir Klitschko. That seemed like a radical opinion at the time, but Tyson wasn't afraid. I always felt that if someone stood up to Wladimir, then he was there to be beat at that stage of his career."

Ironically, the habitually cautious Klitschko was involved in the fight that rekindled the heavyweight flame. In April 2017, Joshua and Klitschko slugged it out before a post-war U.K. attendance record of 90,000 fans, who cheered soccer-style at Wembley Stadium in London. Joshua got off the floor to prevail via 11th-round stoppage in the first RING Magazine Fight of the Year at heavyweight since Tyson-Holyfield in 1996. It was a classic, and the shockwaves reverberated around the world. The reaction from younger fans was like someone had invented fire.

But great heavyweight fights were once commonplace. During his career, Holyfield took on Moorer twice, Lewis twice, Tyson twice and Riddick Bowe in a trilogy. "The Real Deal" sought out superfights with the relentlessness of a sniffer dog. Foreman, for his part, took the championship from Frazier and, soon thereafter, he was slugging it out with Hall of Famers in Norton and Ali. Those three fights happened between January 1973 and October 1974. Nowadays, fans can become frustrated waiting for top-level heavyweight action – and that needs to change.

"The thing that's really changed is there's money available for heavyweight champions to fight just about anyone," said Foreman sternly. "In the '70s, you only made big money by taking on a world champion who put bread on the table. You had to face great fighters.

"I defended the championship against Ali, and we were guaranteed $5 million apiece. I wasn't gonna turn that down. Ali had just come off big fights against Ken Norton and Joe Frazier, but he didn't make that kind of money with them. He got the payday in the title fight against me. Nowadays, a so-called champion can fight anyone and still make big

money."

At least we're off to a good start in 2018. On March 3, Wilder will make his toughest title defense to date against controversial Cuban contender Luis Ortiz at Barclays Center in Brooklyn. Fury will knock off 2½ years of ring rust sometime in the spring before, hopefully, targeting the division elite. And the biggest event to be scheduled this year, Joshua-Parker, takes place at the Principality Stadium in Cardiff, Wales, with three world titles on the line.

"Joshua has caught on because he's charismatic and very engaging," admitted Hubbard before adopting a decidedly different tone. "He has been lucky, though. If the 2012 Olympics hadn't been in London, he might not have won gold. He was lucky to get Klitschko when he was on his last legs – literally. And he's lucky that he's been able to capture the imagination of a British public who are hungry for a bit of glamour.

"I don't think Joshua is unbeatable. I wouldn't be altogether surprised if he's outpointed by Parker, because Parker is a good mover and Joshua has the tendency to fade after the early rounds. The Tyson Fury who beat Klitschko beats Joshua, and probably everybody else, but will we ever see that Fury again?"

Fury dethroned Klitschko via 12-round unanimous decision in November 2015 and had the world at his feet. Unfortunately, the enigmatic Englishman then pulled the very trapdoor that he himself fell through. Title belts vacated, failed tests for PEDS, mental health issues, recreational drug use, a revoked boxing license and an ever-expanding waistline were among his many problems. Thankfully, Fury has now rediscovered his passion for training and his license issues have disappeared along with his additional poundage.

What we miss about Fury, however, is the bombastic personality that he inherited from his predecessor and namesake. When Fury was born on August 12, 1988, Mike Tyson was the undisputed and lineal heavyweight champion of the world. At 22 years old, the Brooklyn native was the most feared fighter on the planet and nobody could stop him. What's interesting is that this danger-zone disposition remained alluring to the public long after Tyson's aura of invincibility deserted him. Fury is more off-the-wall than dangerous, but he provokes a reaction – and that's what counts.

Can today's heavyweight rivalries live up to those of the glamour division's Golden Age?

"Everybody was into Mike Tyson," recalled Duva. "But, to this day, I tell people today that Tyson didn't beat any of the top guys and they'll tell me that's not true. I say, 'No, it *is* true.' I even had a network executive who was involved in all those fights deny it. I told him that Tyson lost all his biggest fights and he acted like I'd spoiled his dreams and ruined everything he'd based his life on.

"Tyson lost to Evander and Lennox but, for the public, he was still the magic ingredient. Mike Tyson is still regarded by many fans as the best, but that outlook is solely based on people's perceptions of his personality. Lennox proved himself to be the very best, but he wasn't the guy with the big personality. He had the big jab, the big punch and the temperament. Tyson had the personality and commanded the public's attention."

So as hard as this might be for you to believe – we need Tyson Fury. However, Duva, whose appreciation for Fury is visceral, would err on the side of caution if she were to promote one of today's heavyweight stars. But it would not be an easy choice to make.

"It would be Anthony Joshua, because he's the man of the moment," said Duva, before leaving the door open for the lineal champion. "I always believed it would be Tyson Fury. Tyson could be the Mike Tyson of his group, because it doesn't matter if he wins or loses. His personality is such that he has the potential to be that guy. If Tyson Fury got his act together, he would still be the one I'd want because of that personality.

"Joshua is well put together. He does a great job. He knocks people out. There's nothing negative you can say about him. But Fury is the guy who can make it crazy and, in my experience, Tyson made it crazy, and that's what the public went for. You need that. You need that guy who's gonna say something outrageous. You can't take that away from Tyson Fury. His personality is remarkable. Is he the best of the group? I don't know, but I think he could have been."

So, there are many things that go

BIG BABY ASSESSES THE RING'S HEAVYWEIGHT TOP 10

Rumor has it that Jarrell "Big Baby" Miller could be in line to face Anthony Joshua in the U.K. star's second fight of 2018, possibly in late summer or the fall in the IBF/WBA heavyweight titleholder's U.S. debut, likely in New York. (And just to be clear, it was Joshua's promoter, Eddie Hearn, who also has a working relationship with Miller, who floated the rumor).

Joshua must first defeat WBO beltholder Joseph Parker on March 31 and Miller, a 29-year-old Brooklyn native whose confidence is as big as his 6-foot-4, near-300-pound frame, must get by Johann Duhaupas on April 28 before we debate the merits of the proposed fight.

In the meantime, THE RING caught up with Miller, the never-shy No. 9 contender, to get his thoughts on the rest of our heavyweight Top 10.

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10. ADAM KOWNACKI: He's a top heavyweight from New York; he's right there in the top 10. He's fan-friendly, come-forward, mix it up with you, aggressive, and I think he's one of the other great heavyweights in the world. His physique? Not all fighters have to have abs. The whole thing is performance and we've not been disappointed yet.

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9. JARRELL MILLER: Am I angry I'm only nine? Sure. I should be higher than nine, but let me hear the rest of the list … I should definitely be in the top five for sure. I should be higher than that!

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8. DOMINIC BREAZEALE: I don't know how the hell eight beat nine! He's an OK guy. I don't see nothing spectacular about Breazeale. He comes to fight, though – puts up a pretty good effort.

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7. DILLIAN WHYTE: I don't see why Whyte is ahead of me! Look who he's fought … (Robert) Helenius or whatever? He hasn't fought nobody decent since the Joshua loss. He's shown me nothing since he got knocked out by AJ. Would I like to get in with him? Most definitely!

---

6. KUBRAT PULEV: (Miller laughs) He's been out of the ring, but he's a top five, good guy, durable, been in with Wladimir Klitschko. He's top 10 for sure, but I don't know he belongs at six. He's been so inactive for number six!

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5. LUIS ORTIZ: He's definitely top five, though he hasn't been super active and he was getting caught on the juice. He definitely deserves a title shot, but Father Time is not on his side. It's now or never for the guy.

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4. ALEXANDER POVETKIN: He got caught on juice, has not been active, on two weeks' notice he fought Johann Duhaupas … I don't get it. Is he top 10? Yes. But four without fighting anybody … it's politics.

---

3. JOSEPH PARKER: That's most definitely the right spot. He does have the WBO belt. They say he's the less dangerous titleholder, but he's still a titleholder. I think it's the right position. Does he have a chance to beat AJ? Most definitely. He looked like crap his last two fights, he fought guys who weren't Grade-A opponents, but he is strong. Against AJ, (Carlos) Takam wasn't really hurt, so I think it will come down to condition – who is more active with his hands. We'll see. It will be closer than people say. I don't see AJ blasting out Parker like most say.

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2. DEONTAY WILDER: He deserves the number one (spot). He's been champ longer. Yes, AJ did beat Wlad, so I guess that's why he's number one … I can see it either way. AJ has the better PR agent. I think AJ has gotten a lot of gifts – that Olympic gold, for instance. He's been promoted the right way, but got a lot of gifts. Who do I like, Wilder vs. AJ? Wilder, still, because he has that one-punch KO power – and better footwork, to an extent. And he's shown better cardio than AJ!

---

1. ANTHONY JOSHUA: He's been overhyped. They're trying to sell people on him and compare him to Ali and Lennox Lewis … c'mon. Compare Lennox and his record, same time frame … it's all talk! Promotional stuff! When he's in with a hungry guy like myself who can box, it will be a different story!

TYSON FURY: Do I agree with RING dumping him? I agree, most definitely. He hasn't fought. I don't see why he was in the rankings. The ratings … I've fought more than Pulev and Breazeale and Whyte … I don't know why they are ahead of me. It's not official rankings, but it is still meaningful to us as boxers.

into making a golden era out of a glamour division. We need a group of quality fighters and we appear to have them. We need contrasting personalities and outlandish characters, and we've ticked that box. We need at least one of the fighters to be transcending the sport and, in Joshua, we have a box office superstar.

However, what we need more than anything are great rivalries.

Foreman has considerably higher expectations than most. The hard-hitting Hall of Famer rose to the top of the heap in the '70s, and again in the '90s when he knocked out Michael Moorer to become the oldest heavyweight champion in history at 45. Foreman believes he saw a new age dawning with Joshua-Klitschko and revealed the potential heavyweight showdown that he feels could take the division to even greater heights.

"What made me happy about Joshua-Klitschko was it was competitive," said Foreman with enthusiasm. "They didn't hang around in the corner and do nothing. They fought. The drama was there like it was in the old days. It was great for the heavyweight division, and it's one of those fights that could have happened at any time in boxing history and we would have been happy.

"But if Joshua and Wilder ever fight, that would bring something royal to the division once again. Wilder is being well groomed and he's gonna be a good one. I'm afraid to put the term 'great' next to him, but he's gonna be a fine heavyweight champion. I think if Wilder and Joshua meet, then it will take heavyweight boxing back to where it needs to be. Max Schmeling-Joe Louis, Joe Frazier-Muhammad Ali. That fight can take heavyweight championship boxing back to its previous glory." RING

Tom Gray is Associate Editor for THE RING. Follow him on Twitter: @Tom_Gray_Boxing

Louder than a bomb: Deontay Wilder is fueled by emotion in the ring.

Suffering Artist

DEONTAY WILDER HAS THE BIGGEST PUNCH IN BOXING AND THE RECORD TO PROVE IT, SO WHY CAN'T THE SELF-DESCRIBED 'KNOCKOUT ARTIST' GET ANY CREDIT?

By **Mike Coppinger**

AL BELLO

He's charismatic. Charming, even.

His fights almost always end in a vicious knockout. Only one man – Bermane Stiverne – has ever lasted the distance, and Stiverne was obliterated in the rematch.

He's willing to fight the best but gets criticized for his lack of opposition. Despite seemingly saying all the right things and presenting himself as the man to beat in the heavyweight division, WBC beltholder Deontay Wilder isn't just underappreciated, he's downright loathed by some boxing fans.

Check social media after Wilder (39-0, 38 knockouts) makes one of his bold proclamations, and chances are some boxing diehard is up in arms.

THE RING's No. 2-rated heavyweight (behind Anthony Joshua) stated he would have knocked out Mike Tyson in his prime. Delusion? Perhaps. But what kind of heavyweight titleholder would he be if he didn't possess supreme confidence in his abilities?

More stupefying is the constant chatter that Wilder has ducked the best possible opponents. Selective memory on the part of some boxing fans, it appears. After all, the Tuscaloosa, Alabama, native was slated to fight Alexander Povetkin in May 2016.

The site? Moscow, Russia, essentially Povetkin's hometown. How's that for enemy territory? Povetkin, of course, tested positive for the banned substance meldonium and the fight was scrapped. So, too, was a quantum leap in class for Wilder, who, despite owning an Olympic bronze medal, had a very limited

amateur background and was practically learning on the job over his first 25 or so pro fights.

Due to his long developmental stage, Wilder has feasted mostly on second- and third-tier fighters in a division short on top-flight fighters. Hence the criticism some fans and members of the media have of the quality of his opposition.

Frustrated, the 32-year-old grabbed another opportunity to fight a feared big man in Cuban boxer-puncher Luis Ortiz. Once again, the matchup was foiled after the discovery of chlorothiazide and hydrochlorothiazide in Ortiz's system – diuretics commonly used in athletics as masking agents.

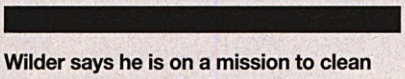
So the scheduled November assignment went up in flames, and Wilder was left to knock out Stiverne (the man he outpointed for the WBC title in January 2015) in only one round.

Wilder is once again set to fight Ortiz, who figures to present the toughest test of his career (the fight was still weeks away when this story went to press). Maybe then, if Wilder is able to render Ortiz senseless the way he's done everyone else, the respect will come. But it's unlikely.

There's already a slew of conspiracy theorists out there to discredit Wilder, saying that Ortiz will take a dive. That Stiverne took a dive, even. And certainly that Malik Scott did.

For Wilder to truly earn the respect of the fanatics, he'll have to beat Anthony Joshua in a battle for all four heavyweight titles and the RING championship – and it's a fight he's been pushing hard for.

"Like (Wilder) wouldn't have likely beaten Wladimir (Klitschko) at that point?" said Lou DiBella, who's promoted all of Wilder's title defenses, alluding to Joshua's victory over the long-reigning champion from Ukraine. "Look at all the stuff beyond his control. His resume still isn't inferior!



Wilder says he is on a mission to clean out the heavyweight division.

AL BELLO

"(Wilder is) going after Ortiz, not running, when no one is pressuring him to fight this beast. (If) he keeps knocking guys out, more of the world – and America – will open their eyes."

Their eyes should already be wide open. Wilder is flawed, to be sure. He often throws his power shots in an elongated, windmill fashion. He leaves his hands down. He looks like a technical mess at times, and yes, he hasn't been tested yet.

He looked pedestrian at times in wins over Artur Szpilka and Gerald Washington, and his chin is considered shaky. He was dropped by Harold Sconiers early in his career and fringe contender Eric Molina was able to buzz him.

But he moves exceptionally well for a 6-foot-6 man. He's fast of foot and his hand speed is impressive, too. His long jab is imposing; it's the tool that carried him to the easy victory over Stiverne in 2015.

If he's going to reign over boxing's glamour division, the jab will be key, but it's not nearly his best weapon. That's his overhand right, arguably the single hardest punch in boxing.

When that blow lands, destruction follows. Men who receive the shot react in ways rarely seen in the ring, and unconsciousness isn't far behind. That's what makes Wilder so fun: He's there to be hit and possibly outboxed, but there's always an anvil hanging over the proceedings, ready to fall on his opponent at any time.

This is the heavyweight division, and if you have an eraser – and make no mistake, Wilder has the big one – little else matters.

"I'm a knockout artist," Wilder said following a February workout in Southern California. "I don't take much damage, but I give all the damage.

"I put people in the hospitals. I put people in stretchers. When you fight me, your head is not the same when you leave. When you fight me, you're really signing a death warrant."

It's talk like that that turns some fans off, especially those who believe he hasn't fought anyone worth bragging about. Soon that will change, starting with Ortiz, and if Wilder has his druthers, a superfight with Joshua.

A matchup pitting two massive, undefeated punchers against each other to decide who will take the mantle from the recently retired Klitschko? They don't get much bigger than that in boxing. You'd have to go back to 2002, when Lennox Lewis knocked out Mike Tyson, or perhaps when Lennox Lewis and Evander Holyfield fought to unify titles in 1999, to find a heavyweight fight that compares.

Joshua-Wilder, which would be a huge event in the U.K., where Joshua is a superstar, may not reach those levels in the United States. But it would be a hell of a start for a division that's been in the doldrums for the better part of the past 15 years.

"I want him just as bad as everybody else wants him," Wilder said. "If it was up to me, we would've been fighting two years ago. I've been calling this man out. ... I wanna clean out the whole division. When it's all said and done for me, I want to say I beat everybody in the division, I wiped out the whole division, there was nobody left that people called the best that I didn't face. That's my mission.

"Because some of the people still doubt me to this day. And I want to show them. For me, there's no greater feeling than proving people wrong.

"They just don't understand what they're seeing. 'How the fuck is he doing what he's doing?' So now they have to label (my opponents) as bums and shit like that, but they would never walk that green mile to get in this ring.

"They would never step in this ring and do what we fighters do – put our life on the line. So many people, 'Oh, I paid my money.' But you're way up in the nosebleed seats."

It's clearly bothers Wilder that there's still so many followers of the sport who doubt him. But he has a chance now to silence them and reach his goal of proving he's "the best heavyweight on this earth."

THE RECKONING

JOSHUA vs. PARKER

THE WINNER OF ANTHONY JOSHUA VS. JOSEPH PARKER WILL BE JUST ONE STEP AWAY FROM COMPLETE HEAVYWEIGHT UNIFICATION

By **Gareth A Davies**

The heavyweight championship of the world remains a celebration, a profound rite of passage in sport. The biggest men on the planet, mano a mano, for the ultimate prize. It is special. We know that sense of magic when the lights are lowered, the anticipation, the thrill it generates as the two fighters make their lonely walk to the squared circle. And 2018 is growing into one of the biggest of years for the heavyweight division in a very long time. The stars are aligning. Collisions are coming. Four undefeated champions (lineal only, in one case), debate aplenty, and now it's reckoning time.

We start the first unification with Anthony Joshua against Joseph Parker in a cavernous stadium in Cardiff, the capital of Wales, 220 miles from London, on March 31. It is the home of Welsh rugby, the scene of huge collisions on the field, and with its giant retractable roof, it has a resonance, a majestic ambience.

In size alone, it is the equivalent of a heavyweight showdown in an American football stadium.

Joshua has become, in a short space of time, a crossover sports star in the U.K., with his huge physique, blue-chip sponsors and belief that a heavyweight champion should carry himself with dignity and pride.

Parker, from the Commonwealth country of New Zealand, is the underdog away from home, the party-spoiler, a man on a mission under the razor wire.

They met face-to-face in mid-January, our two protagonists, in the grandest of surroundings in the Dorchester Hotel on London's swanky Mayfair, amid the most expensive jewelry shops and Ferrari showrooms. Hundreds of flashbulbs, and solemn promises from the dais to bring their all. Their promoters, the fast-moving, eloquent salesman Eddie Hearn and the astute New Zealander David Higgins, had wrangled over the deal for two months, and Joshua, fashionably late to the news conference, will get the lion's share of the money. Two-thirds, amounting to nearly $22 million. Parker, 45 minutes early to the event, will get his portion, comfortably more than five times what he has ever earned before.

And to be fair, in spite of the handshake refusals and pre-talk of smashing glass jaws, it was fairly serene. Pretty gentlemanly, in fact.

The boldness of the New Zealander's team and its declarations of how Joshua's "glass chin" would be "smashed to bits" by the young fighter of Samoan descent was absent, sidelined. Higgins spoke more than the fighter himself. And indeed, Joshua, irked by the campaign to undermine him, clearly wanted to make it HIS SHOW ... and he largely succeeded.

Perhaps none of the preamble really matters, because what the fans want – and indeed what the two fighters want – is a dust-up of epic proportions in front of 80,000 baying fans when the pair meet

An armload of heavyweight titles will be on the line on March 31.

FRANK AUGSTEIN

at the Principality Stadium in the spring. Episode 2 of 3 – after Joshua unified the IBF and WBA titles in his 2017 Fight of the Year with Wladimir Klitschko at Wembley Stadium last April – in the joining of belts in boxing's blue riband division. History in the making here, a new narrative in the division that has crowned a plethora of the most important names not just in boxing, but in all sport, from Jack Johnson to Muhammad Ali to Mike Tyson. Men whose names have resonated across the globe.

And the victor will be within touching distance of becoming the first undisputed heavyweight champion of the world since Lennox Lewis in 1999. American Deontay Wilder holds the other portion of the crown, the WBC title. British broadcaster Sky Sports Box Office has even signed the Alabamian up to be a member of its ringside analysis team on the night. The event is rich with promise. Tyson Fury, once in the wilderness, is also limbering up for his returning shot.

Joshua will return to the scene of his last action in the ring, where Carlos Takam became his 20th victim inside the distance. It will be the first time two undefeated heavyweight titleholders have contested for three belts since Tyson and Tony Tucker in 1987, as well as the first time that two heavyweight titleholders have ever contested a unification fight in Britain. History, really, in the making. Thirty years of strife and politics in boxing's royal weight class may be changing in 2018.

At the London press event, the home favorite felt compelled to defend himself over accusations from the other side that he has been consistently put on the canvas during both his amateur and professional career. He called out Parker and Higgins for pulling a "PR stunt," then launched into a defense of the three occasions when he had been floored – though there have actually been more – by disclosing that he had just emerged from a police cell (the result of "some trouble," he explained later) before he was knocked down by British heavyweight David Price in sparring in 2010.

It would, Joshua assured, give him no cause for concern as he prepared to face Parker.

How well Anthony Joshua takes a punch was a key subject during the kickoff press conference.

Describing his resilience in clambering off the floor en route to last year's 11th-round stoppage of Klitschko, Joshua said, "There is a lot of talk about me being dropped, but there have been only three times it has happened. The first was the European Championships, when only two weeks before I had been called back into the program, because I was banned from the British team. I was very unfit but I got stopped, not dropped.

"The second time was with David Price, when I had just come out [of] a police cell. Price is a puncher and that was down to a lot of experience. And Klitschko taught me that it will take more than a human to stop me from going where I am going. The rumors they have heard are all fake news."

Fake news is not in the mind of WBO beltholder Parker, who believes Joshua is "in for a huge shock." Certainly they have styles that suit each other. Parker likes to come forward, as does Joshua.

"The world is about to find out whether 'AJ' can really take a punch," Parker told me. "My entire existence is now devoted to proving what the boxing world already knows.

"Joshua has done a great job on what he's doing – he has had some great fights, some great wins and is a good champion. But I just think it's my time to come there and put on a great show. I have the confidence that I can knock him out."

Hearn came to his client's aid. "Champions should fight champions and 'AJ' continues to step up to the challenges. It's the first time in history that two reigning heavyweight world champions have met in Britain and it's a classic matchup between two young, fast, undefeated beltholders and it's going to be an explosive fight. This is another huge unification fight for Anthony as he continues to make history in the quest to become undisputed world heavyweight champion."

Much has been made of Parker's last defense. Or, more acutely, the poverty of that performance. The 26-year-old, New Zealand's first heavyweight titleholder, defended his crown by outpointing Hughie

Fury – cousin of lineal champion Tyson Fury – in a turgid affair in Manchester last September, moving to 24-0 with the points victory. Parker was sluggish – ponderous even – in the fight, and many are judging his chances against Joshua based on that. The debate rages.

Higgins swayed the narrative, playing his charge's underdog role to perfection: "New Zealand might be a tiny country on the other side of the world, but it has a hugely proud sporting tradition – and a particularly strong tradition when it comes to whipping Mother England. Joseph Parker is the absolute epitome of the Kiwi sporting battler. It has been said that he is punching above his weight, but he didn't become WBO heavyweight champion by being lucky. He's never been stopped, never even been wobbled in the ring. He's consistently fought fighters in the world's top 10 and he's beaten them all easily. It certainly won't be a shock to me when he beats Joshua and takes his titles back home to New Zealand."

Higgins also reasserted that Parker was "mentally tougher, with greater handspeed" than Joshua.

Indeed, with a rematch clause in the contract should Parker win, they will go at it again in the U.K. in late summer/early autumn, the New Zealander's team has told me.

While many expect Joshua to come out on top, seeing this defense as a preamble to a unification bout with Wilder in the U.S. (or in the U.K. if Hearn presses for it), the Kiwi has other thoughts: "I have watched Joshua for a long time. I know his strengths, he knows mine. I know his weaknesses, he thinks he knows mine. Yes, it's a big challenge, and my aim is to catch him on the chin and knock him out."

The shockwave would be massive. In front of 90,000 fans at Wembley Stadium last year and 80,000 at the Principality Stadium in October, the latest two episodes of "The Joshua Show," the young British heavyweight demonstrated for his growing following – on social media he has 5.1 million Instagram followers (more than the entire population of New Zealand) and 1.77 million Twitter followers – that he can handle the greatest of pressure-cookers. He showed that he has heart, stamina, desire, and can recover during a fight. But did Klitschko let Joshua off the hook when he felled him like a bison with a booming right hand in the sixth round? Many think so.

Andre Ward gave me an interesting take on the upcoming fight – what we know, what we ought to think. Ward retired as a fighter last September, an undefeated world champion at super middleweight and light heavyweight. He concurs that Joshua is a work in progress. But he urged caution on seeing it as a walkover for the Brit.

"He's expected to win, but Parker is a good fighter. He's fast, explosive," Ward told THE RING over a breakfast in Oakland, California. "They say he's a little undersized, but is he really? You get to a certain point as a heavyweight and you can be 215, 220, 230 ... and that's enough for anyone over 260 if you know what you're doing."

But Ward also reasoned that the manner of Joshua's victory over Klitschko, the performance itself, stands him in great stead. "That fight with Klitschko will have made him better. It will have made him a tougher fighter. He's been to the big dance. I'm not just talking about the big crowd, I'm talking about beating a legend and getting off the floor to do it. He's going to be tough to beat because of that. You can fight 50 guys who don't have a name and this guy may have fought 20 and fought two guys who gave him a gut-check. I'm taking the guy with the 20 fights and the two proper ones. He proved something.

"This is a big stage and a big ask for Parker. That's what I love about this sport. You have something called 'rising to the occasion,' and not everybody can do it. They talk a good fight and then get to the moment and realize the moment swallows them up. I've said all the right things, but my legs are shaking and I'm scared to death. I can't perform because I'm in awe of the occasion and the opponent. Nerves are one thing – we all have them – but you learn to push through the nerves. That's what makes you a great fighter."

With those words in mind, a few days after Joshua and Parker had split to their respective camps – Joshua to the English Institute of Sport in Sheffield, Parker to a quiet corner of Henderson, Las Vegas – I traveled to Nevada to see the New Zealander and his trainer, Kevin Barry.

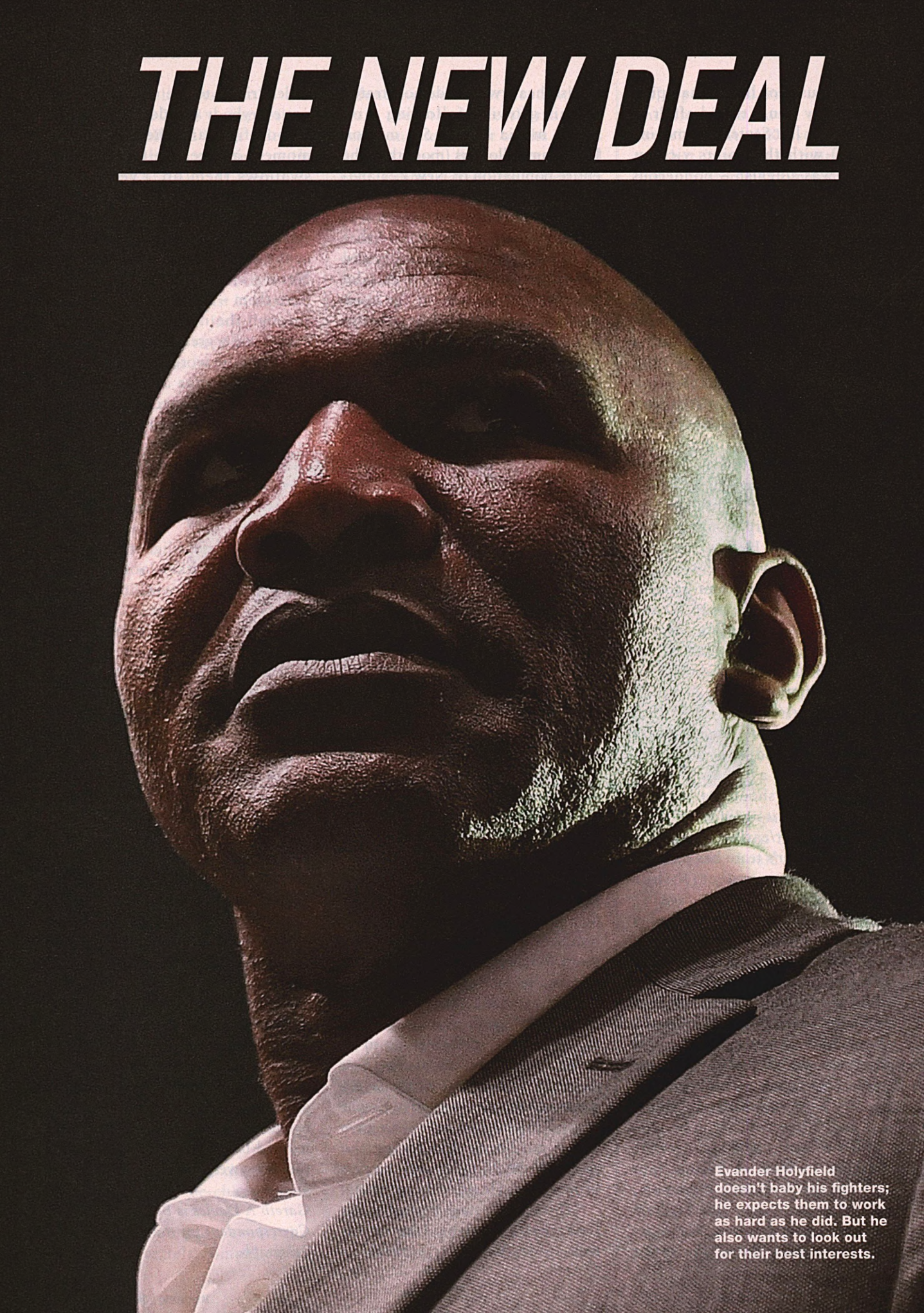
They worked diligently the day I was there. Parker looked fresh, happy, confident, working on fast feet, fast hands. Barry is convinced that they "are getting Joshua at just the right time."

After a long workout, and lunch together, Parker told me that this is the fight he has wanted for a long time and it means something. "A lot of the fights I've had were against fighters that move well and give me trouble. Joshua comes forward; he doesn't move around a lot. He's got good defense and good power, but we're looking to be elusive with speed and movement. We will put everything into this to become victorious."

Words are cheap. Now it's about action, acumen. Parker's mantra is to defeat Joshua. The overriding mission for Joshua, as he sees it, is to be the new savior of the division. Big men, big ambitions, big fight. On March 31, in Cardiff, as the lights go down and the march continues, two nations expect to find out who is really headed toward being crowned the king of the heavyweight division.

Gareth A Davies is Boxing Correspondent for the London Telegraph.

THE NEW DEAL



Evander Holyfield doesn't baby his fighters; he expects them to work as hard as he did. But he also wants to look out for their best interests.

EVANDER HOLYFIELD IS TURNING HIS UNMATCHED WORK ETHIC TOWARD THE REALM OF PROMOTING

By **Joseph Santoliquito**

He knows others like him have failed at what he's trying to do. But Evander "The Real Deal" Holyfield wouldn't be who he is if he wasn't defying some sort of odds. His nemesis, Mike Tyson, gave it a shot and fell smack on his face. Sugar Ray Leonard made an attempt and it went nowhere. Even Floyd Mayweather with his many millions has found that promotional success doesn't come easy. One of the few fighters who have ever tried to promote and succeeded over a healthy period of time is Oscar De La Hoya and his Golden Boy Promotions.

Holyfield is trying to join that short list.

The Real Deal has a cargo chest full of things he did throughout his Hall of Fame career that he wasn't supposed to do. He beat Tyson twice – when many feared he'd lose his life the first time they met. He beat George Foreman. He beat Larry Holmes. He beat Riddick Bowe. He was an undersized 6-foot-2, 215-pound heavyweight who often gave away 20, 30 and one time almost 100 pounds (Nikolay Valuev in 2008) to opponents. That didn't deter him. He became a four-time titleholder primarily on sheer determination.

Maybe it's that self-reliant quality that will make Holyfield's promotional company, Real Deal Boxing, the success Golden Boy is.

The Real Deal held a seven-fight card at the SugarHouse Casino in Philadelphia during a week in which the city and its NFL team, the Eagles, were celebrating a berth in the Super Bowl. Still, it was well-attended and it showed signs that Holyfield could be making strides where others have slipped. The card featured some talented prospects, including Philadelphia welterweight Poindexter Knight (2-0, 2 knockouts), Detroit welterweight Janelson Bocachica (9-0, 6 KOs), Philly-area super middleweight Brandon Robinson (9-1, 7 KOs), New York middleweight Edgar Berlanga (7-0, 7 KOs) and Philly lightweight Steven Ortiz (8-0, 3 KOs). While the ability was there, the matchmaking could use a little polishing. Only one of the seven fights went the distance.

But this is just the start for Holyfield. He's held a handful of fight cards so far. He says he wants to keep it simple for the fighters under his promotional banner, using the tried-and-true bromide he inherited from his mother, Annie: Be honest and work hard. It made him an all-time great.

Evander Holyfield raises heavyweight Carlos Negron's hand at the inaugural Real Deal Boxing event in June 2017.

"That's all it is," said Holyfield, 55. "I grew up in the ghetto. I grew up poor, dirt poor. I know what brainwashing is. The promotional game is a hard one, I know. It's why I'm up front with the fighters, (to) pass on my knowledge. Make a person feel like they need you or they ain't nothing – I never fell for that. My mama brought me up smarter than that.

"No one will work harder than me. Ain't nobody can do something better than I can do it myself. It's why I won. I always did a little bit more work than everybody else. This will be more of the same. You take the small steps, and then bigger steps, and then bigger steps."

Real Deal Boxing, like the fighter it's named after, is working its way up without any major TV deals. The fights are shown via live streams on Holyfield's website, therealdealboxing.com. The venues are much like Philly's SugarHouse Casino, able to fit about 2,000 and sometimes dressed up with ringside notables like Michael Spinks and Holmes, who each made the trip to Philly to join their fellow Hall of Fame buddy.

The ballroom at the SugarHouse was about three-quarters filled, with most fans more eager to see Holyfield than the fighters. For his part, Holyfield didn't disappoint. He was approachable, cordial and exceedingly gracious, despite being pulled and yanked every which way in-between fights.

He says he has no timetable for when he wants to take his promotional company to a higher platform. His main concern, he stressed, is the fighters.

"My thing is, I want to give guys the opportunity to become something, like I had," Holyfield said. "I'm too old. I can't fight for them. But we have talented guys who I think have the ability to be champions, with the right opportunity. I want them to work hard. I want them to be accountable. My whole life, my mama said life is about accountability. If you take responsibility for things you do, you'll be a success. There are no shortcuts. By the time you're ready to fight for a championship, you'll be ready, not there based on a lie. Be true to who you are. It's what I'm trying to provide." RING

RISING SONS

Clockwise: Ryoichi Taguchi nails Robert Barrera with an overhand right, Hiroto Kyoguchi blasts Carlos Buitrago with an uppercut, Naoya Inoue looks on the fallen Ricardo Rodriguez, and Daigo Higa attacks the body of Moises Fuentes.

A COMPREHENSIVE LOOK AT JAPAN'S RICH BOXING TRADITION AND ITS NEW GENERATION »

By **Doug Fischer** and **Anson Wainwright** •
Photos by **Naoki Fukuda**

The inaugural "SuperFly" card was groundbreaking on two important fronts. First, it proved that a market for sub-featherweight fighters exists within the U.S. boxing scene, as evidenced by the capacity crowd that gathered at the StubHub Center in Carson, California, last September and by the revenue the HBO-televised show generated. (The junior bantamweight-loaded card brought in the second highest gate in the history of the popular outdoor venue, according to the event's lead promoter, Tom Loeffler.)

SuperFly also marked the first time a Japanese star's U.S. debut was hotly anticipated by the American boxing community, and "The Monster" did not disappoint. Naoya Inoue defended his WBO 115-pound title by breaking down the capable Antonio Nieves in the opening bout of HBO's broadcast.

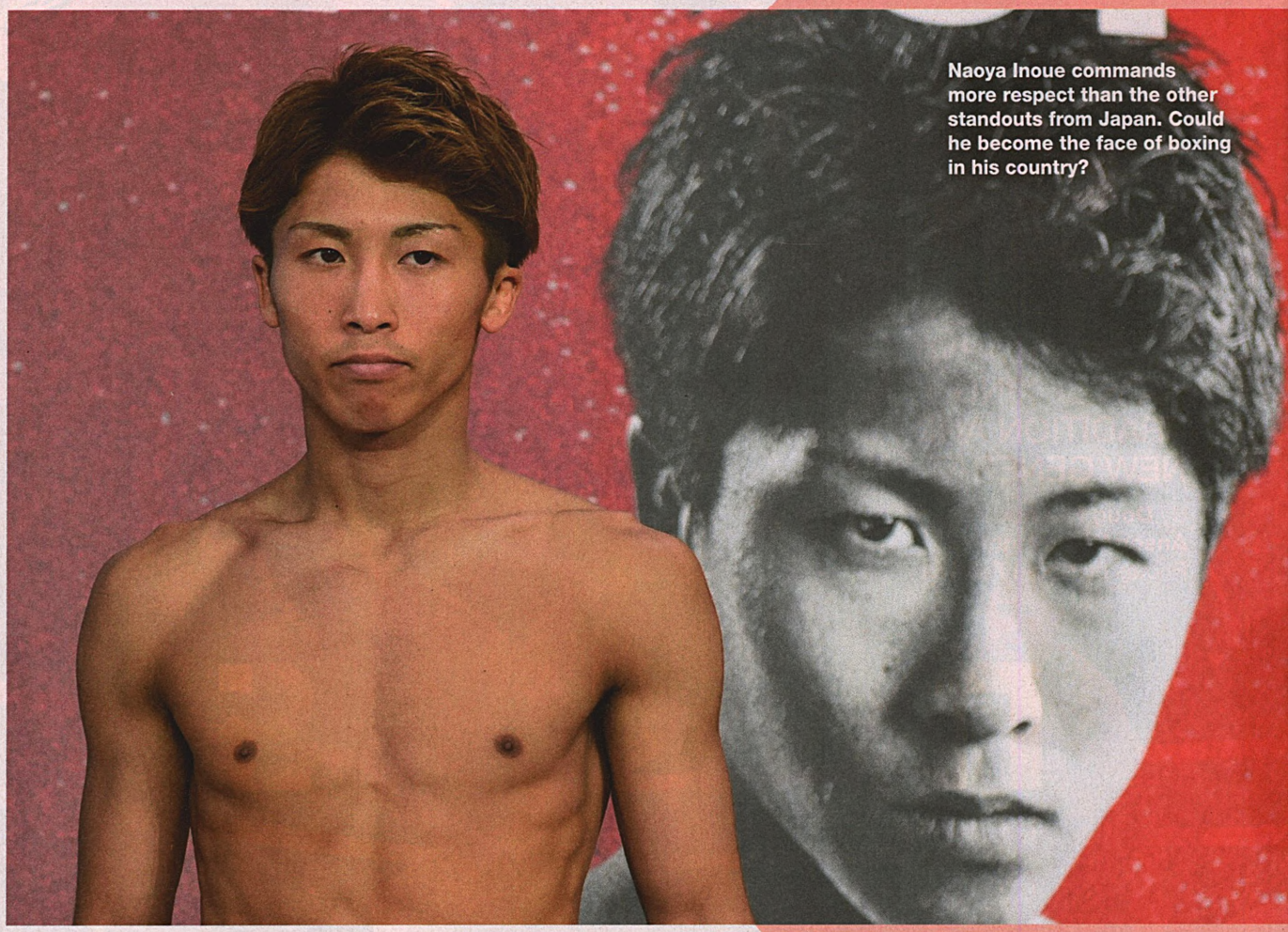
It isn't news that Inoue entertained a large crowd on a U.S. cable network. Hardcore American fans have grown accustomed to watching fighters from Japan engage in exciting bouts in recent years, thanks to fight-of-the-year candidates involving notable Japanese sluggers Takashi Miura, Yoshihiro Kamegai and Nihito Arakawa.

However, witnessing a pound-for-pound boxing talent from Japan kick ass on U.S. soil was something new. If there are other exceptional young Japanese boxers willing to travel, perhaps what we saw in September could become a trend.

And that's where one paradigm shift (U.S. network interest in the flyweight and bantamweight divisions) relates to the other (Japan's best young boxers wanting to come to America).

Inoue is the most highly regarded boxer from Japan, but he isn't the island nation's only standout. Japan currently boasts 10 world titleholders, half of whom are in their early-to-mid 20s with less than 20 bouts on their ledgers. Like Inoue, these young guns are still in the early stages of their professional boxing careers.

Who are these boxing prodigies? And how is it that Japan, a country smaller than California, keeps churning out young boxing talent and world titleholders? THE RING editor Doug Fischer and frequent contributor Anson Wainwright seek to answer these questions with the help



Naoya Inoue commands more respect than the other standouts from Japan. Could he become the face of boxing in his country?

of Japan's top promoters and most respected journalists.

However, before we assess Japan's next generation, an overview of the culture's current boxing scene and history is in order.

A PROUD TRADITION

Japan has produced world-class professional boxers going back to when Yoshio Shirai won the flyweight championship in 1952. Masahiko Tokuyama, Jiro Watanabe, Hiroshi Kobayashi, Ishimatsu "Guts" Suzuki, Toshiaki Nishioka and Hozumi Hasegawa.

In all, Japan has produced nearly 90 world titleholders, a total topped only by the U.S. and Mexico. It's a striking number made even more impressive given the Japanese Boxing Commission (JBC) did not recognize the IBF or WBO sanctioning bodies until 2013.

flyweight titleholder/RING champ Ryoichi Taguchi, aggressive flyweights Daigo Higa and Sho Kimura, overachieving junior flyweight Ken Shiro, and precocious strawweights Hiroto Kyoguchi and Ryuya Yamanaka.

It must be pointed out that Murata holds the WBA's "regular" 160-pound title, which isn't recognized by THE RING in light of Gennady Golovkin's WBA "super" title, and Yamanaka

A world title has been on the line in half of undefeated Kosei Tanaka's 10 pro fights.

("Fighting") Harada, a Tokyo-born flyweight and bantamweight champion during the 1960s, and Yoko Gushiken, an ultra-talented 108-pound buzzsaw from Okinawa who reigned during the 1970s and early '80s, have been enshrined in the International Boxing Hall of Fame.

Other notable Japanese champions include Masao Oba, Masamori

CROWDED FIELD

As previously stated, Japan began 2018 boasting 10 major beltholders, a total that is second only to the U.S., which has 13. These Japanese titleholders are: Inoue, popular middleweight Ryota Murata, junior featherweight standout Ryosuke Iwasa, RING bantamweight champ Shinsuke Yamanaka, unified junior

currently holds only THE RING's 118-pound belt, but it's still an impressive total considering two-division beltholder Kosei Tanaka vacated his WBO 108-pound strap late last year to campaign at flyweight, while three-division titleholder Kazuto Ioka, veteran junior lightweights Takashi Uchiyama and Miura, and strawweight mainstay Katsunari

Takayama have recently retired.

RING-rated Japanese fighters who do not currently hold world titles include former RING flyweight champ Akira Yaegashi (No. 8 at junior flyweight), former 118-pound beltholder Tomoki Kameda (No. 10 at junior featherweight), Masayuki Kuroda (No. 8 at flyweight) and Tatsuya Fukuhara (No. 10 at strawweight).

Joe Koizumi, the doyen of Japanese boxing writers, advises diehard fans to keep an eye on the following up-and-comers: strawweight Tsubasa Koura, flyweight Katsunori Nagamine, junior featherweight Yusaku Kuga, lightweight Masayoshi Nakatani, junior welterweight Hiroki Okada and junior middleweight Takeshi Inoue. The unbeaten 154-pounder is of no relation to Naoya Inoue, but Naoya's younger brother Takuma is currently competing in the bantamweight division.

Other Japanese prospects to watch out for include Reiya Konisha and Satoshi Shimizu.

Most of the aforementioned boxers were introduced to the sport through Japan's strong amateur boxing system, which includes high school competition. The amateur system feeds into a healthy professional scene. The country hosts around 200 professional shows a year, half of which take place in Tokyo (mostly at Korakuen Hall, a legendary 2,000-seat venue that has hosted daily combat sports cards since the 1960s). Other Japanese fight towns include Osaka, Yokohama, Nagoya and Kyushu.

Koizumi, an International Boxing Hall of Fame inductee who has tried his hand at matchmaking, managing and even corner work, believes there are three factors that have enabled Japan to consistently cultivate quality professional boxers.

"Number one is the ticket-distribution system, where our promoters usually pay the boxers' purses in the form of tickets, which the boxers and their managers then endeavor to sell to exchange into money," Koizumi said. "Our boxers themselves are good ticket-sellers to their families, friends and supporters, which supports the shows they are on.

"Number two is that we have a system where we see A-class, B-class and C-class tournaments to separate the good and promising boxers from the ordinary participants. The winners of the novice four-round tournaments are entitled to be ranked at the bottom of the Japanese ratings in their respective weight categories. The winners of the B-class or six-round tourneys can move up in the JBC ratings.

"Also, the winners of the A-class tournaments can be the mandatory challengers to our national champions. Plus, there are developmental title targets, such as the OPBF (Oriental and Pacific Boxing Federation) and the WBO AP (WBO Asia Pacific) regional belts that help the boxers enter the world ratings. Basically, we put on constant competitions to cultivate our prospects."

Koizumi says the third factor in Japan's robust boxing scene is having several experienced promotional companies, each with its own talent niche, home region and accompanying television and sponsor deals.

"We have influential promoters, such as Teiken, which developed Ryota Murata, Jorge Linares, Roman Gonzalez and Shinsuke Yamanaka into champions; Watanabe Promotions, which developed Ryoichi Taguchi and Hiroto Kyoguchi; and Ohashi Promotions, which developed Naoya and Takuma Inoue, as well as Akira Yaegashi. These three (companies) are very active and stage their shows on Japanese networks."

A GOLDEN ERA?

Hideyuki Ohashi, a former two-time strawweight titleholder who heads Ohashi Promotions, is excited about the young boxers in his stable and the promising fighters from other promotional companies. However, he laments that the general Japanese public is not as aware of this talent as hardcore fans in other countries.

"Generally speaking, the level of Japanese boxers has advanced over the past decade in terms of physical ability and technical skill, as you can clearly see when you watch Naoya Inoue fight," Ohashi told THE RING. "Currently, there are many Japanese boxers that I believe would prevail over the best overseas boxers in their weight classes. That wasn't the case in the past.

"So, I am very pleased that there are many Japanese world champions among the top four sanctioning bodies. However, frankly speaking, I think the Japanese boxing industry has failed to make the Japanese people understand that we've got some of the best talent in the world."

Ohashi believes the young talent is there for a golden era of Japanese boxing, but it won't happen without the support of the public.

Hitoshi Watanabe, president of Watanabe Promotions, says the promoter-run gyms of Japan and the JBC's decision to allow the IBF and WBO to sanction title bouts there have sparked the talent boom we're witnessing now.

"The club-owner system, under which the gym owners are also both promoters and managers of professional boxers, has kept the Japanese boxing market alive, regardless of how small it is compared to foreign markets, and a few big gyms keep terrestrial broadcasting contracts with Japanese networks."

Japan's oldest gym and most successful promotional company, Teiken Promotions, was founded in 1946. It has deals with Nippon TV and WOWOW, a subscription cable channel that airs major fights from other parts of the world on its long-running "Excite Match" series.

Ohashi's gym and promotional company was founded in 1994 (shortly after he retired from the ring). It took him 10 years to produce his first world titleholder, entertaining former 115-pound beltholder Katsushige Kawashima. Ohashi is

Daigo Higa is managed by former champion Yoko Gushiken (right), one of the most celebrated Japanese boxers of all time.

partnered with Fuji TV.

Watanabe's gym and promotional company has developed four world titleholders since its inception in 1981, two in recent years. Watanabe, who has a TV deal with TBS (Tokyo Broadcasting System), is pleased that Japanese boxers can now fight for all four sanctioning organization belts on home soil (not just the WBA and WBC, as had been the tradition for decades).

"Some say that the word 'world championship' has lost its rarity or value now that there are four world titles to be contested for in Japan," Watanabe told THE RING. "However, to the contrary, we are utilizing the existence of multiple world championships for freshly exciting matches and further improving the Japanese boxing industry by holding more title matches."

However, Akihiko Honda, president of Teiken Promotions, doesn't believe quantity equals quality when it comes to world titleholders. Japan's most influential boxing figure says the number of professional boxers has dropped in recent years.

"Although Japan currently has 10 boxing champions, this is not a golden era of boxing," Honda told THE RING. "Ryota Murata and possibly Naoya Inoue have achieved star status, but the others have not, and it is very difficult to have the fights televised in Japan.

"I agree that the (skill) level of boxers has improved over the past few years, but the number of licensed boxers has declined by one third compared to two years ago, which makes matchmaking more difficult to do because of the lack of available fighters.

"I realize this is not the impression that the rest of the world may have by looking at the number of world champions, but this is the actual situation in Japan."

The somewhat bleak picture that Honda paints suggests that while Japan is good at producing world-class boxers, it's not as good at making stars, which could prompt the new crop of young beltholders to seek significant bouts and big money outside of their homeland.

Here are the six most talented and accomplished young fighters on the rise. Yuriko Miyata, a longtime writer for Japan's Boxing magazine and website, and Katsuo "Catch" Miura, a veteran reporter for Japan's Boxing Beat publication, graciously provided their insight. »»»

NAOYA INOUE

Age: 24
Record: 15-0 (13 knockouts)
Titles: WBO junior bantamweight, WBC junior flyweight
Strengths: "Everything!" Miyata said. "Speed and power, especially. He is a complete fighter." Miura says Inoue's ability to close distance early in a fight makes him special. "He has quick feet and great accuracy with his counterpunches. This is how he takes advantage of opponents in the early rounds."
Weaknesses: "There are no defects in his fighting style," Miyata said. "His only weakness is fragile hand bones. He has suffered so many injuries." Miura says Inoue's weaknesses won't be exposed until he faces naturally bigger opponents.
Rise: A former amateur standout and arguably Japan's most talented active fighter, Inoue sprang to prominence with a 10-round decision over countryman Ryoichi Taguchi for the Japanese title in his fourth pro bout and then won his first world title, the WBC 108-pound strap, in his sixth fight (and inside 16 months of turning pro). He jumped an entire division (flyweight) and demolished respected, long-reigning 115-pound beltholder Omar Narvaez in two rounds for his second title, which he has defended seven times.
Future: Inoue appears headed for bantamweight, although he has yet to abdicate his WBO 115-pound title. Miyata is convinced that Inoue will move up in weight, possibly beyond the 118- and 122-pound divisions, where she believes he will realize his full potential. "We have not seen the real Inoue, because he drains himself making weight before his fights. Sparring in the gym is where to see him at his best. Inoue overwhelms Genesis Servania, a featherweight contender who knocked down (WBO titleholder) Oscar Valdez last September, in sparring, which is why some insiders believe he can one day compete at 126 pounds.

"He won't admit it, but he is interested in (WBO bantamweight titleholder) Zolani Tete. A long time ago he began looking at Tete's fights on video, knowing that the African will be very hard to deal with one day. That is how he is. Working hard and studying hard makes him special."

DAIGO HIGA

Age: 22
Record: 15-0 (15 KOs)
Titles: WBC flyweight
Strengths: "Determination and physical strength," Miyata said. "He's always aiming for the KO." Miura says Higa's trainer (Joji Nogi) likens his prize pupil's punching power and technique to something you'd see in a comic book. "He is gaining momentum with the public now because of his aggressiveness and combination punching."
Weaknesses: "Sometimes I think Higa is too thrilling, too absorbed in the fight, and his strategy suffers because of it," Miyata said. Miura questions Higa's defensive skills. "We haven't seen him even try out his defense when he is attacked by opponents because he can overpower them. I also wonder if he can overcome a slick and crafty boxer with good handspeed."
Rise: Higa is managed by former WBA junior flyweight titleholder Yoko Gushiken, who has ably used his own experience to navigate his protégé. Higa won his first world title in May, hammering Juan Hernandez in six rounds, and has since maintained his 100 percent knockout record with his first two defenses against Thomas Masson and former beltholder Moises Fuentes. Higa, who looks extremely formidable at 112 pounds, could develop into one of the key figures in Japanese boxing in the coming years. He's already THE RING's No. 2-rated flyweight.

"Higa is the first Japanese boxer to reach a world title with all KO victories," said Miyata. "He and Yoko Gushiken have a strong bond as both are from Okinawa, which is well-known for its brave boxers. Those good storylines, his nice personality and friendliness – and of course his exciting fighting style – have made him popular rather quickly."
Future: More title defenses and more learning. Higa has the potential to be the best flyweight in the world, but with an unaccomplished amateur background (he never came close to winning a national title) and limited pro experience, it will take some time.

KEN SHIRO

Age: 26
Record: 12-0 (6 KOs)
Titles: WBC junior flyweight
Strengths: "Ken is skilled and brave," said Miyata. "He's got a great jab that helps him pace his fights, and he always keeps good balance." Miura adds: "He's a good counterpuncher. His game is always progressing. He's what we call an 'all-rounder' – he does everything right."
Weaknesses: "Lack of power," said Miyata. Miura adds: "While he doesn't have any weak spots, he's not outstanding in any area."
Rise: Like many Japanese standouts, Shiro won the national title after only a handful of fights and quickly added the OPBF belt to his collection before turning his attention to the world title. He edged grizzled veteran Ganigan Lopez to win the WBC 108-pound strap by majority decision last May and defended the title with another hotly contested majority decision over RING-rated former beltholder Pedro Guevara in October. Shiro closed out 2017 with a rare stoppage victory (over Gilberto Pedroza). He is trained by his father, Hisashi Shiro, a former 175-pound OPBF champion, who also holds his promotional rights.
Future: Shiro is scheduled to face Lopez in a rematch. If he is able to

defeat the Mexican veteran again, a potential unification bout against Ryoichi Taguchi would be a huge event in Japan in the second half of 2018.

KOSEI TANAKA

Age: 22
Record: 10-0 (6 KOs)
Titles: WBO junior flyweight, WBO strawweight
Strengths: "Quickness," said Miyata. "Also great reflexes, intelligence and mental toughness." Miura agrees that Tanaka's reflexes – and fast hands and feet – set him apart from his opponents.
Weaknesses: Mental lapses and defensive holes that lead to occasional knockdowns, according to Miyata. Miura adds: "He gets caught with punches from his opponents unexpectedly. Sometimes his conditioning seems unstable, which may be due to the strain of making weight."
Rise: The precocious boxer-puncher is already a two-division titleholder despite only having 10 bouts. He won the WBO strawweight title in just his fifth fight. After one defense, he vacated and stepped up to junior flyweight, where he promptly added the WBO belt with a career-best win, stopping veteran Moises Fuentes in five rounds. He looked set for a December unification showdown with Ryoichi Taguchi. However, in his second title defense he met the spirited challenge of Palangpol CP Freshmart, who succumbed in the ninth round, but only after fracturing both of Tanaka's eye sockets. The injuries forced Tanaka to withdraw from the Taguchi fight and vacate his belt to step up to flyweight.
Future: Tanaka is scheduled to face unbeaten Filipino prospect Ronnie Baldonado in his flyweight debut on March 31. If successful, he is expected to target Sho Kimura for the WBO 112-pound title.

HIROTO KYOGUCHI

Age: 24
Record: 9-0 (7 KOs)
Titles: IBF strawweight
Strengths: "Hiroto's got a bouncy offense and variety with his left hand, especially to the body," said Miyata. Miura says Kyoguchi has a mean left uppercut and relentless work rate. "He's a Roman Gonzalez freak, so he tries to imitate Chocolatito's style," added Miura.
Weakness: Despite his healthy KO percentage, he is "not a big puncher," according to Miura. His lack of experience is a weakness for the time being, says Miyata.
Rise: Kyoguchi sprang to prominence following a strong 2017. The aggressive boxer-puncher won a domestic title early in the year, defended it once and then scored a 12-round unanimous decision over rugged Mexican standout Jose Argumedo to lift the IBF 105-pound title. He impressively retained his title for the first time against RING-rated Carlos Buitrago, who was unable to withstand the Osaka native's withering body attack and was stopped in eight rounds.
Future: Kyoguchi has the potential to be the best strawweight in the world, but there shouldn't be any rush, given his lack of fights and time in the pro ranks.

"There's a lot room for development," said Miyata. "It's still less than two years since he turned professional in April 2016. He still hasn't convinced the Japanese public that he's special, but he has plenty of time to do that.

"When he was a teenager, he was taught technique from his one of his idols, Joichiro Tatsuyoshi, a charismatic former WBC bantamweight during the 1990s. The beautiful angle of Kyoguchi's left to the body is from Tatsuyoshi. He's fun to watch right now, but I am expecting that further experience will serve him."

RYUYA YAMANAKA

Age: 22
Record: 15-2 (4 KOs)
Titles: WBO strawweight
Strengths: "Yamanaka is a good boxer with a consistent jab and good defensive skill," said Miyata. Miura adds that Yamanaka "uses a variety of punches, especially the left hook counter, to frustrate opponents."
Weaknesses: Miura says Yamanaka's lack of experience against quality opposition is his main weakness, but Miyata is harsher in her criticism. "He lacks power and braveness," she said. "Nobody should ever insult any boxer, but the WBO title bout between Yamanaka and Tatsuya Fukuhara was called the 'Japanese championship' by insiders. I almost hesitate to talk about him as a world champion."
Rise: Yamanaka turned professional at 17 and learned on the job, suffering a couple of early defeats against a pair of journeymen. He continued to improve and embarked on a five-bout win streak that led to a fight with respected former beltholder Merlito Sabillo. The two clashed for the vacant OPBF crown and the Osaka native out-boxed the Filipino veteran. Last August, Yamanaka again stepped up in class against compatriot Fukuhara, wresting the WBO belt away from his countryman by close but unanimous decision.

"It is great that he did as he planned," said Miyata. "Now he is the world champion that he had dreamed about being since he dropped out of high school at 15 to devote himself to the sport. They say a title can change a fighter. Hopefully, the belt will give him confidence to improve and entertain people more when he fights."
Future: Yamanaka is scheduled to face Moises Calleros on March 18 in Kobe.

Christy Martin put a face on a sport many didn't even know existed in the mid-1990s.

UNSTOPPABLE

THESE DAYS, **CHRISTY MARTIN'S** RESILIENCE IS INSPIRING MORE THAN JUST THE RISE OF AN ENTIRE SPORT

By **Thomas Gerbasi**

It was the question Christy Martin didn't expect, but like any boxer worth her salt, she rolled with it and came back strong when asked about turning 50 years old on June 12 of this year.

"It's crazy, isn't it," she said. "Many different times in my life I wasn't sure I would make it, so I'm happy to hit the big five-oh. They said all the good stuff's supposed to start happening after 50, so we'll see."

Martin may be getting a head start on that "good stuff," even if she's so busy these days that she hasn't had a chance to smell the roses. Currently making her home in Charlotte, North Carolina, "The Coal Miner's Daughter" is juggling teaching, training and promoting, and even found the time to get married last November to a former opponent, Lisa Holewyne.

"The good thing is, we got the fight out of the way first," laughed Martin, who decisioned Holewyne in 2001. "But I'm very, very happy. I'm blessed."

We won't call it a happy ending yet, because Martin is still penning her tale, but it is a state many didn't believe possible for the women's boxing pioneer after the harrowing events of November 23, 2010, when her then-husband, trainer and manager, Jim Martin, tried to kill her, stabbing her several times before shooting her in the chest.

But people like Christy Martin don't go away that easily. They fight. She did. And she lived.

"I can't believe everything I've lived through, and I can't believe that the person I was married to and trusted was stealing money from me. And not only that, but to actually stab me repeatedly and point-blank shoot me, it's overwhelming. To really wrap my brain around that ... we're seven years past and for whatever reason, something had triggered me and I keep seeing it and I can't quite get what happened out of my mind. It's hard to believe that this happened to me. It didn't happen on TV in a movie. This is what happened."

Before all of this, Martin's life was already the stuff of a Hollywood film. Born Christy Salters (the name she uses in her personal life) in Mullens, West Virginia, she was an accomplished athlete who eventually abandoned the basketball court for the ring, turning pro in 1989 at the age of 21.

Her talent was obvious, her left hook was a thing of beauty, and the greatest compliment being paid to her at the time was that she fought like a man. But opportunities for women in the sweet science were nearly nonexistent.

"It was very difficult, because no major promoter wanted to give me an opportunity," Martin said. "No one was going to take women's boxing seriously. It was hard. The pool of opponents was very shallow. You didn't know what your opponent was like until you got in the ring. It was much different than what it is today, because women have had the opportunity now to fight in the amateurs and there's been media coverage for local fights, so videotapes and things like that are much more available."

Martin adjusted well, learning her trade on the job, and as the wins piled up, she eventually got her shot when Don King signed her. On January 29, 1994, she fought on the Felix Trinidad-Hector Camacho undercard, knocking out

Susie Melton in 40 seconds on a show that also featured Julio Cesar Chavez, Thomas Hearns, Meldrick Taylor and Tim Austin.

There was no turning back now, and soon she would be featured on Mike Tyson undercards, bringing a light to women's boxing that it never had before. That made Martin a star – and a target – and she loved it all.

"That's probably what kept me going, because I knew I had the target on my back and everybody wanted to put a win on their resume by beating me, and I wanted to prove that I was the best," she said. "And I took a lot of pride in getting the opportunity to fight on the Tyson shows and be promoted by Don King. I didn't want to let them down."

She didn't, with the classic brawl against Ireland's Deirdre Gogarty in a swing bout on the Tyson-Frank Bruno II card in March 1996 that garnered Martin the cover of Sports Illustrated. It was an unprecedented achievement that no female boxer has reached since.

"I was so lucky being in the right place at the right time, and I was just ready to fight," she said. "Deirdre Gogarty was a great opponent and it was all about timing. The Tyson fight ended early, the Gogarty fight was a war, so it was all timing. I think what I did that night, under Tyson with everybody watching, it brought so much attention and awareness to a sport that most people probably didn't know existed."

For a while after Martin's SI appearance, there was hope for the ladies of the sport. Networks started airing bouts, the media was paying more attention, and with the emergence of Lucia Rijker as a legitimate rival for Martin, the sport had its first superfight. But then it didn't happen, as an injury forced "The Dutch Destroyer" out of the July 2005 bout.

"I think Rijker's injury was bogus and still, all these years later, no one's gonna convince me that it was anything but a bail-out," Martin said. "And I was crushed. I was in the best shape of my life, and the truth is that when that fight didn't happen, I should have retired because it took a part of my hunger. It took the edge off. I had trained so hard and that was the fight that everybody talked about and that was gonna set me apart from everybody. So many people thought that she was gonna beat me, and I knew she couldn't."

Martin went 3-2-1 from the cancellation of the Rijker fight through 2009. And then she had to fight for her life.

Married at 23 to 48-year-old Jim Martin, Christy not only dealt with her husband's increasing verbal and physical abuse, but also his threats to reveal to the world that she was a lesbian, all the while draining the estimated $4 million she made over the course of her career. It all came to a head in their Apopka, Florida, home in November 2010, when Christy told Jim she was leaving him and became the victim of a horrific assault.

Remarkably, Martin would fight again, getting halted by Dakota Stone due to a broken hand in 2011. During surgery for the injured hand, Martin would suffer a stroke, but she didn't reveal this

Martin's war with Deirdre Gogarty in 1996 catapulted women's boxing into the public spotlight.

Promoter Don King (here reuniting with Martin in 2011) made the bold move of putting Martin's fights on Mike Tyson undercards in 1996 and 1997.

to anyone and opted to fight once more, losing a 2012 decision to Mia St. John. The same year, Jim Martin was convicted of attempted second-degree murder and sentenced to 25 years in prison.

Christy Martin didn't get her 50th win, retiring with a 49-7-3 record, but she had closure. She could finally move on and tell her story.

"I'm from a small town in West Virginia," she said. "I've been promoted by Don King, fighting on Mike Tyson cards in Las Vegas and fighting in The Garden. All these awesome things have happened, but at the same time, that was my public life. My private life was hell. It's hard to explain and hard for anyone else to understand, but it was a fight for me."

She's winning that fight, though. In 2017, the Boxing Writers Association of America announced that it was going to begin presenting a Women's Fighter of the Year award, naming it after Martin. And with that announcement, a new generation is starting to discover her impact on the sport.

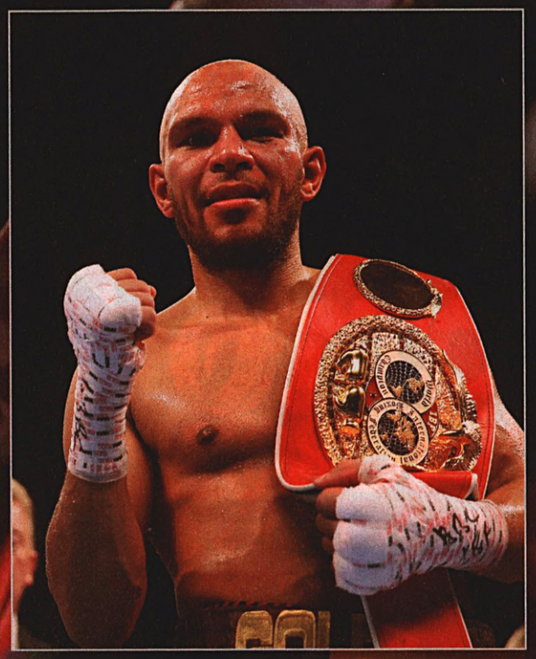
"I hope so," Martin said. "Whether they agree or disagree that I was a good fighter, I just would like for them to realize that I helped open a lot of doors to make women's boxing possible for a future generation. ... I feel like I made it easier for them. I was mentally equipped to face the struggle and the fight to get the opportunity that women's boxing needed at the time."

More importantly, the tale of Christy Martin thus far is one that transcends boxing, and one day, her impact outside the ring may be greater than anything she did inside the ropes.

"I feel like God left me here for a reason, and that's to help other people by sharing my story," she said. "Or maybe somebody hears my name and they look it up and see what happened to me and it gives them strength. This is why I'm here. Jim had held it over my head so much about the homosexuality, but now I'm very comfortable with who I am. This is who I am, and I'm proud to tell everybody Lisa's my wife. I love her and I can't wait to spend the rest of my life with her.

"I think there are a lot of social issues I think I can help people become more comfortable with, so it's less about boxing these days and probably more about bringing awareness to domestic violence or people's sexuality and just their choice of life. Whatever you want to do, you should be comfortable and do it. Who cares what people think?" RING

THE LESSONS OF LOSS



CALEB TRUAX'S DRAMATIC VICTORY OVER **JAMES DEGALE** PROVED THAT WINNERS DON'T REQUIRE PERFECT RECORDS

By **Gordon Marino**

It used to be that coming back from a loss was part of the graduate education of a serious professional boxer. "Money" and Marciano aside, all the greats had nights when they had to suffer the gut punch of having to watch their opponent's hand raised.

However, perhaps because of the money undefeated Floyd Mayweather raked in, many fighters today are afflicted with a phobia about losing. They either pad their records with veritable pillow fighters or, when they

Caleb Truax's prior losses were part of the seasoning he needed to pull off the upset against a heavily favored James DeGale.

lose, there goes their all-important swagger and confidence.

Recently crowned super middleweight titleholder Caleb "Golden" Truax (29-3-2, 18 knockouts) has never feared testing himself against the best. A former pigskin and baseball star, Truax started boxing after he suffered a knee injury on the gridiron. As a 19-year-old student at the University of Minnesota, Truax entered a couple of Toughman Contests and soon found out that exchanging punches could replace the pleasure of making tackles.

After a short amateur career, Truax made his pro debut in 2007. Instead of feeding the young lion a bunch of easy meals, promoter Tony Grygelko and manager Ron Lyke resolved that Caleb would get his fistic upbringing with a steady and diverse diet of gritty and talented fighters – boxers, punchers, southpaws, righties ... you name it.

A native of Osseo, Minnesota, Truax copped the IBF 168-pound belt in December with a majority decision over James DeGale (23-2-1, 14 knockouts). Considered a veritable tune-up opponent, the underdog traveled to England and whupped DeGale in his own backyard.

On the way to becoming only the second Minnesotan in modern times to win a world title (St. Paul native Will Grigsby earned 108-pound titles in the 1990s and 2000s), Truax had endured defeat at the gloved paws of former champ Jermain Taylor, a draw with veteran Ossie Duran and, with some victories mixed in, knockout losses to Daniel Jacobs and Anthony Dirrell.

After the first-round stoppage to Dirrell in April 2016, Truax admitted, "I was very close to quitting." But as a graduate with a major in sociology and a minor in African-American Studies, Truax took a lesson from those drubbings, saying, "From the fights with Jacobs and Dirrell, I learned that to be at that elite level you have to pour your heart and soul into it. You have to be mentally ready, physically ready. Everything, man. That's what I was able to be and prepare myself for this last fight." Recalling his triumph, Golden said that by the time of the DeGale fight, "I was just ready to roll. I took ten and a half years of experience and wrapped it into a couple of right hands."

Truax fought brilliantly against DeGale. According to his longtime trainer, Tom Halstad, "Caleb's punch output was higher than it has ever been. He was strong. His jab was working."

An amiable and wise master of mayhem, Truax explained that his gridiron background helped him win the title. Maybe because they don't want to spike their nerves, a lot of boxers leave watching film to their trainers. Not Truax. He explained, "Coming from a football background, I was used to watching film." He noted, "I must have watched his (DeGale's) fight with Badou Jack 30 times. Our whole team would watch film, and then we would get together, compare notes and come up with a fight plan."

The clips revealed that the 2008 Olympic gold medalist was slick, that Truax couldn't outbox him in the center of the ring, but that DeGale didn't appreciate getting pressured and liked to lay squared-up on the ropes.

Truax and company concluded, "I had to make it a dogfight." And he did, overpowering his southpaw opponent with punishing bodywork, double jab-right hand combinations and the Duran/Tyson special: right hook to the body, uppercut to the chin.

According to Lyke and Halstad, Truax's ability to keep his weight centered and not fall in as he attacked was a key to his surmounting the super middleweight peak.

Asked about the moniker "Golden," Grygelko explained that he came up with it because Caleb was a "Golden Gopher" (University of Minnesota). But Lyke added, "No, it is because Caleb is perfect. He eats right, trains hard. He listens."

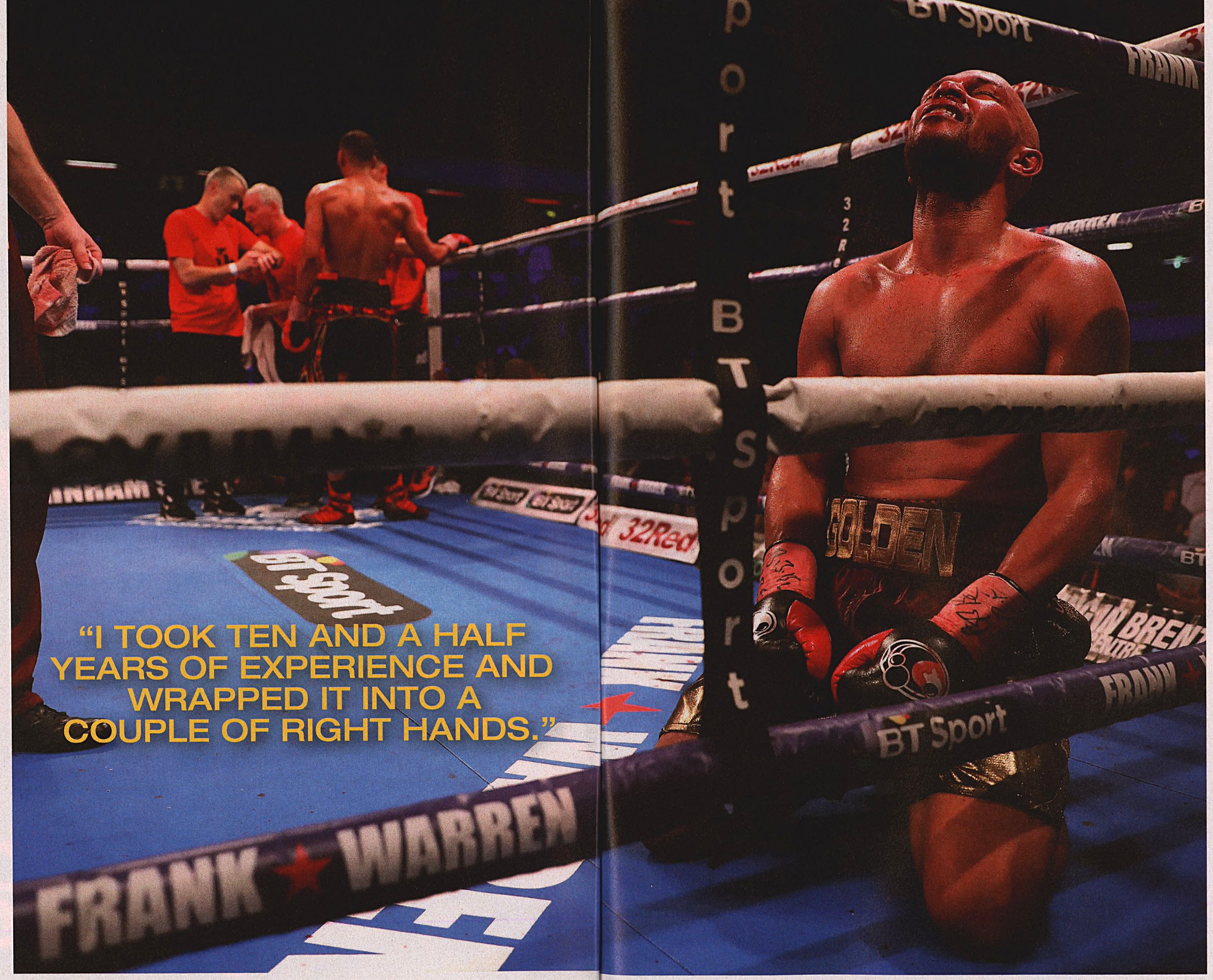
Perfect? Lyke grinned and corrected, "Well, near perfect. He could stop dropping his left hand and jab a little more."

It would have been remiss not to ask the obvious: What did it feel like to win the title? Shaking his head as though the big night were yesterday, Truax responded, "Fantastic. It's every fighter's dream ... I still can't find the words to describe it."

Like Mayweather, Wladimir Klitschko and a few others, Truax never gets out of condition, which is to say, he never has to get "back in shape" – a big plus in the world of the ring. But more than anything, Truax has heavyweight resilience. His explanation is simple: "Right from the day one, I learned always to get up when you have been knocked down." He could have added that if you want to be a world champion, don't quit after a knockout loss.

The afternoon THE RING paid Truax a visit, he was sparring with junior middleweight gatekeeper Carson Jones. After the workout, he was pressed, "Who's next?"

The new champ replied, "Well, we are negotiating with DeGale for a rematch either here in Minnesota, Vegas, or England. If that does not work out, I would love another fight with Dirrell. Whoever it is, I want to keep busy and fight two or three times a year. After all, I'm 34 and as much as I love boxing, I don't plan on doing this forever."



Truax might've believed in himself all the way, but beating DeGale was no less overwhelming.

Errol Spence Jr. (left) dismantled Lamont Peterson with relentless pressure.

FIGHT REPORTS

BY **BRIAN HARTY**

RECENT ACTION AND FUTURE SIGNIFICANCE

ERROL SPENCE JR. TKO 7 LAMONT PETERSON

(Jan. 20, Barclays Center, Brooklyn, NY)

WHAT IT LOOKED LIKE:

Errol Spence Jr.'s jab is like one of those party horns that's all tightly wound up and then you blow and – *ffwwp!* – it's poking your friend in the forehead. For the person getting poked, it's annoying – which is why you do it again – but relatively harmless and just gets your victim to swat at something that's not there anymore. Spence's jab is, in other words, an excellent one. The follow-up is what adds injury to insult.

Lamont Peterson worked damn hard to make it a tough night for the defending IBF welterweight titleholder, and in short bursts he was on the mark and successful at being the man who was punching instead of getting punched. The 34-year-old's crafty bodyshots and barking hooks upstairs did nothing to drain Spence's resources or rattle his confidence, however, and when Spence turned the pressure around – which was always – his delivery of damage was uncompromising and methodical.

A minute into Round 5, Spence ended a series of taps with a left cross that caught Peterson on the temple and dropped him. For the remaining two thirds of the round, the former 140-pound titleholder seemed to be the target of a single unrelenting, drawn-out combo – one splintering blow after another from a lumberjack chopping in five places at once. By Round 6, both eyes were swelling shut and Peterson had the posture of a man with food poisoning, and by the seventh,

Spence backed off in favor of more showy punches that painted the writing on the wall in giant, safety-orange letters.

All that remained was the most difficult part of the night – for Barry Hunter, Peterson's trainer, to throw in the towel, which he did after agonizing over the decision to let his proud fighter come out for the eighth round.

WHAT IT MEANS:

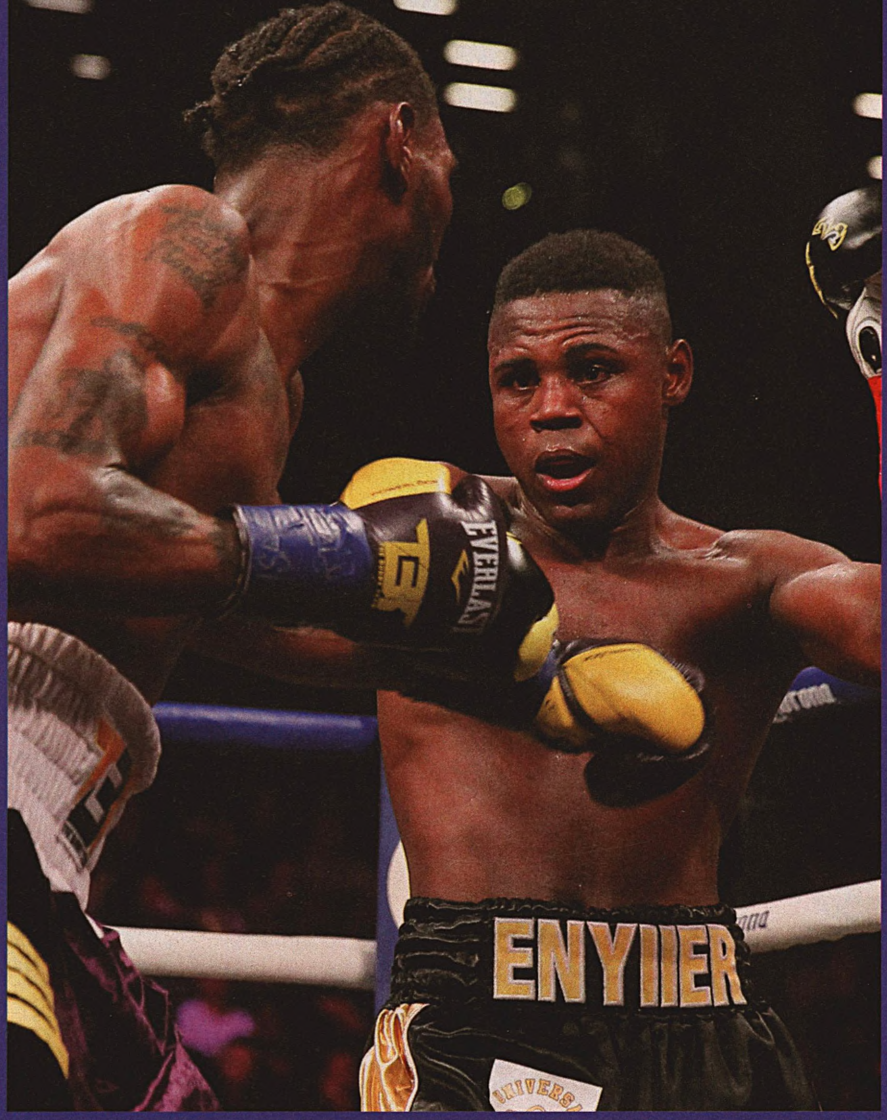
Performances like this go a long way toward silencing those who thought Spence (23-0, 20 KOs) arrived on THE RING's pound-for-pound list prematurely, and show that the 2012 Olympian is more than just possibly the best welterweight in the world. A lot of those same people think Keith Thurman (28-0, 22 KOs) deserves that label and should've been on the P4P list already. Spence explicitly said after beating Peterson that he wants that fight. For his part, Thurman told RingTV.com, "You're not gonna see it in '18, baby." So it looks like we're playing the marination game with this one.

In the meantime, Showtime has slated Spence's return for June 16 in Dallas, with undefeated Mexican Carlos Ocampo currently in line to be fitted for his sacrificial lamb's bell. Danny Garcia has also been mentioned as a potential opponent.

ROBERT EASTER JR. SD 12 JAVIER FORTUNA

(Jan. 20, Barclays Center):

A 5-foot-11 lightweight … You'd think that would dictate fighting from the outside, wouldn't you? Tweet all advice to @RobertEaster_Jr, because he'll need it if he hopes to hold his IBF belt against the likes of Jorge Linares, Vasyl Lomachenko or Mikey Garcia. It was an ugly fight, but a lot of watchers felt Fortuna took it with his cleaner punches. A point deduction for rabbit-punching in Round 2 was his undoing, though, as the cards went 114-113 in his favor and 115-112 and 114-113 for Easter.



Robert Easter Jr. (left) did not look like a Top 5 lightweight against Javier Fortuna.

ADAM KOWNACKI KO 6 IAGO KILADZE

(Jan. 20, Barclays Center):

Polish-born Brooklynite Kownacki is an intriguing new fellow in the heavyweight top 10. Popular, a little sloppy, a little jiggly in the middle, the undefeated (17-0, 14 KOs) 28-year-old is also a two-time Golden Gloves winner with a big right hand. He used it overhand-style to drop Kiladze in Round 4 and then again for a pair of uppercuts and the straight-power finish, thus following his July stoppage of Artur Szpilka with another impressive win.

JORGE LINARES UD 12 MERCITO GESTA

(Jan. 27, The Forum, Inglewood, Calif.)

WHAT IT LOOKED LIKE:

It's actually sort of shocking when Linares decides to show what he's capable of doing. It happens so suddenly that you almost want to have the "ramping" effect editors use in action movies, where time slows down long enough to see the reflection of the bullet in the hero's eye as it passes, then returns to normal speed. Linares puts punches together so quickly and so fluidly that his talents – which include the dancerlike level of his balance and footwork, though he lacks the otherworldly lateral skills of Vasyl Lomachenko – often put him in the pound-for-pound conversation.

Gesta, who tried unsuccessfully

Jorge Linares (left) simply outclassed a motivated Mercito Gesta over 12 rounds.

to win a lightweight title against Miguel Vazquez in 2012, was amped-up and started out strong, but "the Linares effect" soon began to undermine his pressure tactics. Causing psychological injury as much as anything, the bewildering punch-swarms accumulated to the point that the challenger's early wide-eyed intensity gave way to something more resembling sorrow by the middle rounds. The final scores were an accurate summary: 118-110, 118-110 and 117-111, all for Linares.

But even as the Venezuelan dominated the fight, we were reminded by a trickle of crimson from his right eyebrow, starting in Round 8, that as long as boxing involves somebody even slightly touching his face, Linares is at risk of bleeding out.

WHAT IT MEANS:

Linares (44-3, 27 KOs), the current RING and WBA lightweight champion, is now on a 13-fight win streak and seems to have fully internalized the lessons from his setbacks a few years ago. There's no question he's a card-carrying member of boxing's elite in terms of talent. Watching him fight Gesta, though, you have to wonder if he's at risk of being too enamored with that talent himself – of wanting to win the exchanges more than the fight. He showed a tendency to demonstrate his superiority and then turn his head and walk away – a kind of nonchalant flourish after the magic trick. If this is evidence of a killer-instinct deficiency, he'll find it difficult to hang with Mikey Garcia or Lomachenko – a cold assassin on one side and a contemptuous wizard on the other.

Linares is at the peak of his career and eager to make something big happen. All indications are that Golden Boy Promotions shares that sentiment and is cooking something up for him.

LUCAS MATTHYSSE KO 8 TEWA KIRAM

(Jan. 27, The Forum, Inglewood, Calif.)

WHAT IT LOOKED LIKE:

It was weird. Matthysse got the knockout, but he looked so unlike his frightening self that the RING RATINGS PANEL made the rare decision *to lower him* after the win. Maybe he had a bad night, maybe he got old at 35, but the Argentine looked distracted, his punch output and connect rate were low, he wasn't putting combinations together and he was taking more than he should have against a fighter of Kiram's level – which it quickly became apparent was not as high as his perfect record suggested.

Then again, Matthysse *did get the knockout*, but even that was strange. Kiram, who looked enormous for a welterweight, much less a boxer from Thailand, went down on his back the first time from a jab/grazing right hand duo. Soon after, he was on the ropes when Matthysse popped him with another jab – and *not even a big jab*. A good second later, but before another punch could land, Kiram collapsed and was counted out. Not that any punch from Matthysse would be easy to take, but … a jab.

WHAT IT MEANS:

Matthysse (39-4, 36 KOs) called out Danny Garcia and Manny Pacquiao in his post-fight interview. Pacman will be fighting Mike Alvarado on the Terence Crawford-Jeff Horn card on April 14 in Las Vegas, and after that there's talk of Pacquiao facing Lomachenko -- same as there's

talk of everybody else below light heavyweight facing Lomachenko. With Crawford joining the field at welterweight and every indication being that "The Machine" would fare even worse against Garcia than he did as a 140-pounder in 2013, 147 is looking like a minefield. HBO commentators Jim Lampley and Roy Jones Jr. mused over the idea of pulling Marcos Maidana out of retirement to face his countryman.

OLEKSANDR USYK MD 12 MAIRIS BRIEDIS

(Jan. 27, Arena Riga, Riga, Latvia)

WHAT IT LOOKED LIKE:

The chaos of trying to find a way to watch this cruiserweight semifinal of the World Boxing Super Series was a fight in itself, but a last-minute combination of Facebook and YouTube Live saved the day and audiences in the U.S. were able to share in the beauty of nature's greatest matchmaker: the bracket.

Skilled, conditioned, classy – this was just two really excellent fighters going at it on a level just slightly tilted in Usyk's favor. The Ukrainian's crazy mobility sometimes seems like it's on the verge of irresponsible, simply because you wouldn't expect to have much control over 200-plus pounds flying around like that. In contrast, Briedis took a more grounded approach and had success with his hard, choosy punches when Usyk's defense lapsed. But in general, Usyk's upper-body movement is outstanding and his ability to fire with accuracy, change his angles and slip punches before bouncing back into a tight defensive shell is pretty extraordinary for a cruiserweight. And there's always a quality punch or two in those five-shot combinations.

After 12 high-energy, back-and-forth rounds, Usyk (14-0, 11 KOs) retained his WBO title and annexed Mairis' WBC strap by the telling scores of 115-113, 114-114 and 115-113. Briedis proved he belongs with the best, though, and at least in THE RING's ratings, the loss had no effect.

WHAT IT MEANS:

See Gassiev-Dorticos

MURAT GASSIEV TKO 12 YUNIER DORTICOS

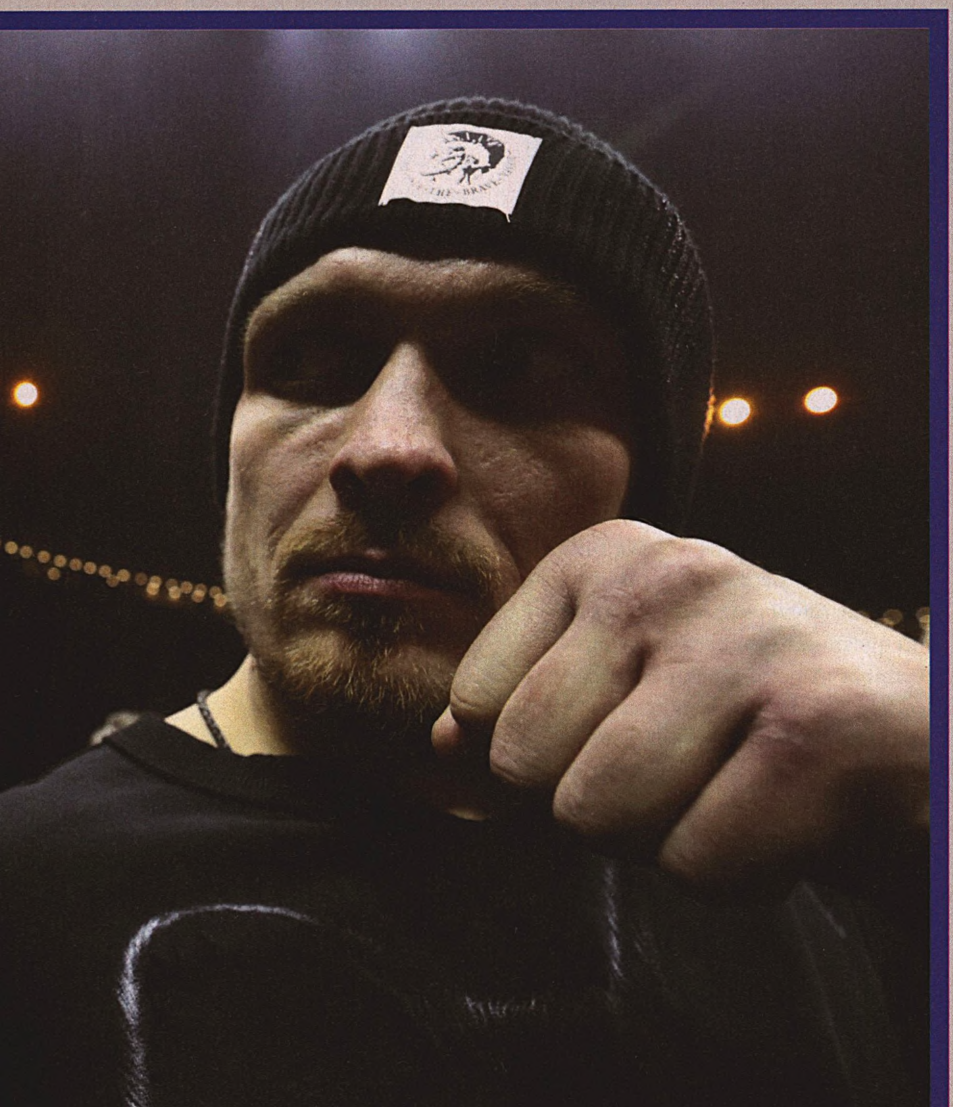
(Feb. 3, Bolshoy Ice Dome, Sochi, Russia)

WHAT IT LOOKED LIKE:

Just like the other half of the WBSS cruiserweight semifinal, this was a high-level piece of entertainment and competition with no losers except for the people who couldn't find the broadcast.

The rangier Dorticos, who was fighting to keep his recently upgraded WBA title as well as take Gassiev's IBF belt, made the Cuban traditionalists proud early on, outworking the California-based Russian with a steady delivery of accurate punches behind his jab. Gassiev, who might be described as a "menacingly serene" sort of person, wasn't winning but he made good use of his time, probing his opponent with sporadic but withering uppercuts and bodyshots. In Round 5 he staggered Dorticos with a left hook, and from that point the momentum drifted steadily into his corner.

There were no lulls in the action – just an accumulation of wickedly precise blows (those uppercuts!) which strained and eventually snapped the willpower holding Dorticos up. He was nearly gone in



Oleksandr Usyk is the favorite going into the WBSS cruiserweight final, but Murat Gassiev gained believers with his most recent win.

VALERY SHARIFULIN

Yunier Dorticos was perhaps too brave for his own good against Murat Gassiev, who floored the Cuban three times in Round 12.

the 11th round after getting caught from below, but held on while the 24-year-old Gassiev patiently waited for the inevitable. It came in the next round, when the soon-to-be-finalist slipped a punch, dipped to his left and unloaded a massive left hook that instantly crumbled Dorticos, who would make it to his feet but fall twice again before the fight was stopped with just a few seconds on the clock.

WHAT IT MEANS:

The final will be on May 11 in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, between Gassiev and Usyk for the WBSS Muhammad Ali trophy, the IBF, WBA, WBC and WBO titles and, since it's No. 1 vs. No. 2, the vacant RING championship. It really doesn't get much better, and – this cannot be emphasized enough – lots of people should be fired over the fact that no TV network in the U.S. has picked up this marvelous example of how boxing should work.

Usyk, the amateur star with the 335-15 record and Olympic gold medal but only 14 pro fights, will most likely be the favorite to win, but young Gassiev (26-0, 19 KOs) was more than impressive enough to gain some believers. Don't expect to make much money betting either way. Before their good-natured staredown in the ring after Gassiev's victory, Usyk said it best: "I expect a spectacular and beautiful fight." RING

VIDEOS

BY LAMAR CLARK

WITH SOCIAL MEDIA NOW LEADING THE WAY WE GET OUR BOXING FIX, IT'S NO WONDER EVERY SELF-PROCLAIMED AFICIONADO WANTS TO HAVE A VOICE. BUT NOT ALL UPLOADS ARE CREATED EQUAL. THESE GUYS STAND OUT FROM THE PACK, THANKS TO THEIR HUSTLE BEHIND THE CAMERA AND LIFE IN FRONT OF IT.

PHOTOS BY **MATTHEW HEASLEY** »

Radio Rahim

Affiliation:
SecondsOut.com and MaxBoxing (105K+ combined YouTube subscribers)*

Ak and Barak

Affiliation:
SiriusXM Radio (32M subscribers) and ThisIs50.com (438K+ YouTube subscribers)*

Elie Seckbach

Affiliation:
ESNEWS (262K+ YouTube subscribers)*

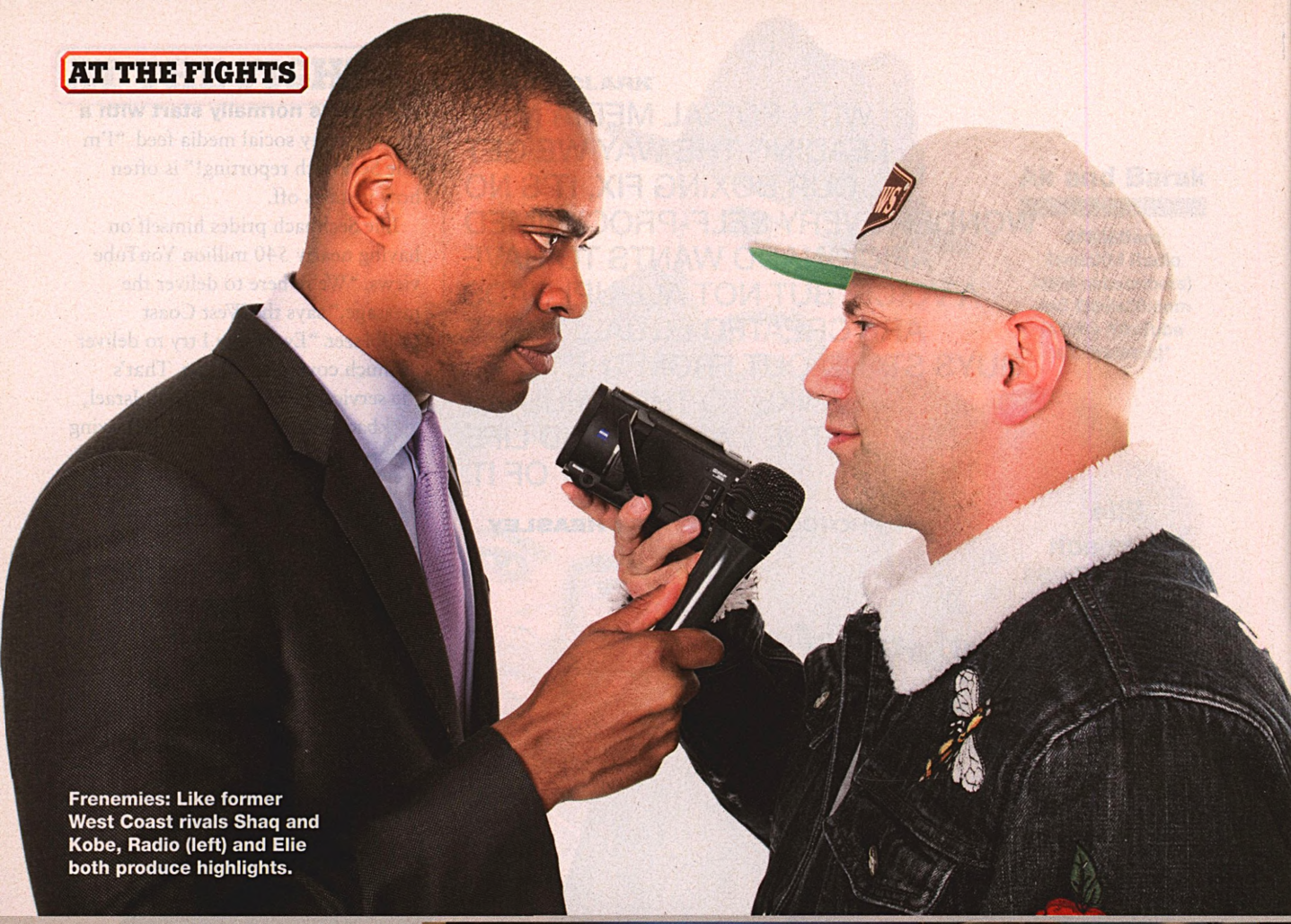
My breaks normally start with a peek into my social media feed. "I'm Elie Seckbach reporting!" is often how it starts off.

Elie Seckbach prides himself on having nearly 540 million YouTube views. "We're here to deliver the message," says the West Coast trailblazer. "Every day I try to deliver as much coverage as I can. That's the service I provide." Born in Israel, Seckbach has been chronicling boxing on his channel ESNEWS since 2006. With his unassuming style and early coverage inside the world of Manny Pacquiao, Elie found his groove and is now recognized by more fans than some fighters. He's basically the Howard Cosell of uploads.

Next video.

Radio Rahim says he's been interviewing since the 10th grade. His throwback tone and newsie interactions have landed him sponsors and a ton of eyeballs. "I'm a broadcast journalist," says the Bay Area native, "I write, I do stories and I interview in what I consider to be

*SUBSCRIBERS AS OF 2/15/2018



Frenemies: Like former West Coast rivals Shaq and Kobe, Radio (left) and Elie both produce highlights.

introspective ways." Radio Rahim is always on the scene.

Next video.

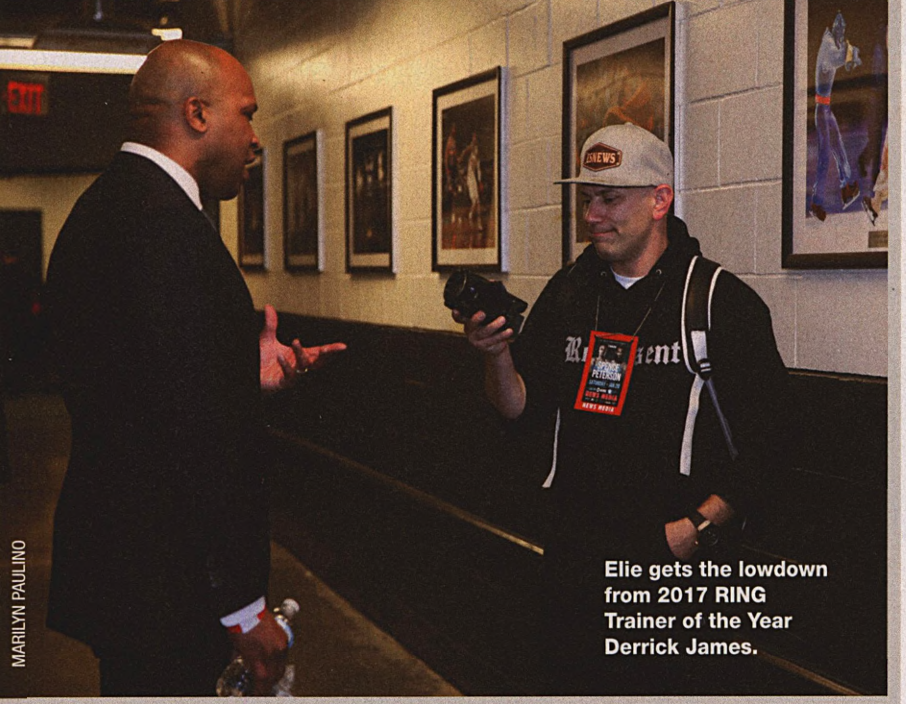
When Brooklyn natives and childhood associates Kamal Barak Bess and Akin Reyes aren't on set mixing it up with boxing's hottest stars for their ThisIs50.com webshow, they're choppin' it up with legends at SiriusXM Radio as co-hosts on RUSH 93's boxing show. Their hip and knowlegable mix connects with their guests. "When you talk to us, you can relate," says Barak with a nod, "We are them, we wear the same clothes." "Fashion is just one component of the culture," adds Ak, "along with the lingo and the music that we listen to. So, when we have a conversation and interview, it goes a little different." A familiar formula, we know (remember KO Nation), but Ak and Barak have managed to nail it.

Next video. Cancel. Back to business. RING

Ak and Barak take calls from listeners during their SiriusXM show. Below: Terence Crawford stops by the show on ThisIs50.com.

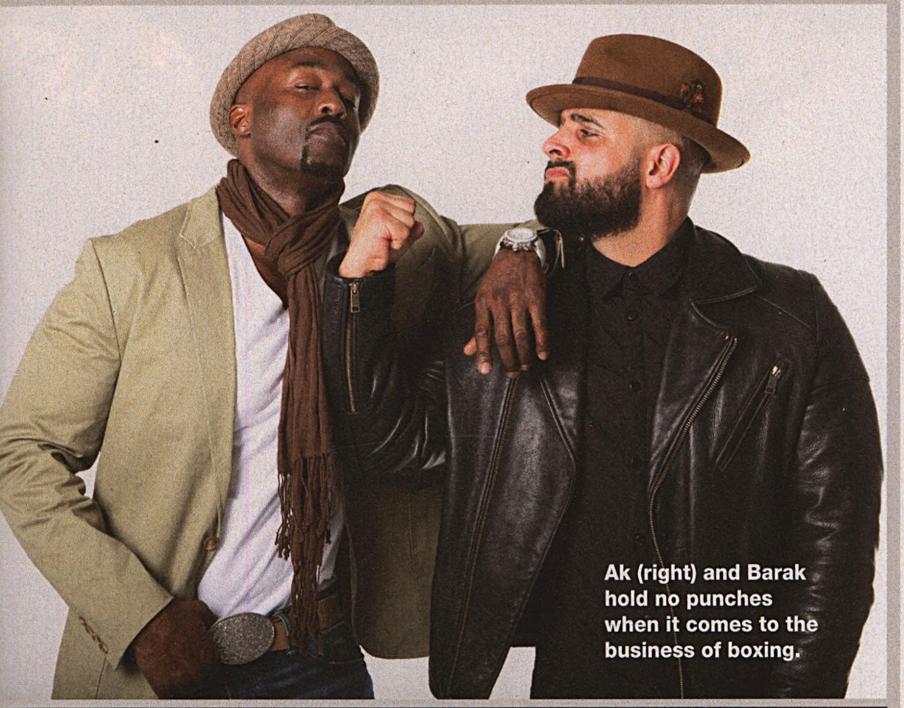
JANER BIGIO JR

JANER BIGIO JR

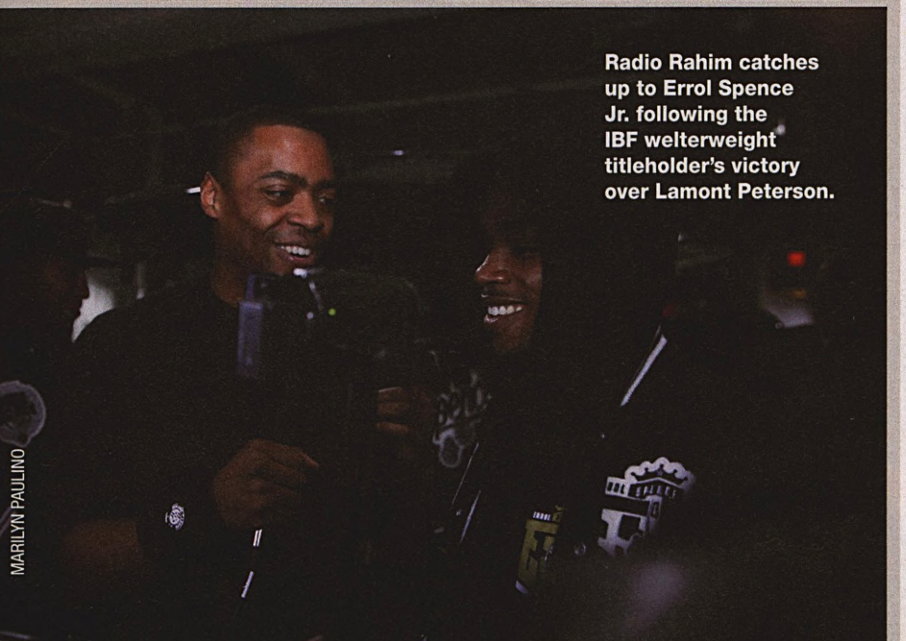


MARILYN PAULINO

Elie gets the lowdown from 2017 RING Trainer of the Year Derrick James.



Ak (right) and Barak hold no punches when it comes to the business of boxing.



Radio Rahim catches up to Errol Spence Jr. following the IBF welterweight titleholder's victory over Lamont Peterson.

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RETURN OF THE DESTROYER

George Foreman hooked up with trainer Gil Clancy following his defeat to Muhammad Ali, and the acclaimed coach did a great job of refining the former champion's devastating game. In January 1976, Foreman got off the floor twice to knock out Ron Lyle in THE RING's Fight of the Year. In June '76, he decked former champion Joe Frazier twice en route to a fifth-round stoppage in their rematch. And in this shot, from August of that year, Foreman has just finished off Minnesota-based contender Scott LeDoux in three. The normally durable LeDoux launched a firestorm of heavy artillery before being floored by a huge right uppercut to the jaw. On the strength of these victories, Foreman was named THE RING Fighter of the Year for 1976.

ACROSS THE POND

BY GARETH A DAVIES

TYSON FURY STRIPPED OF HIS RING HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP

Having been there in his hometown on the English coast to present Tyson Fury with the RING Magazine belt early in 2016, after his amazing efforts to take the heavyweight crown from Wladimir Klitschko in November 2015, your correspondent can report firsthand the glow it gave this huge, enigmatic man. It meant the world to him.

In other times, the removal of the RING belt – due to inactivity – would have hit Fury hard. Very hard. It most likely still did, even though Fury put on a stoical face in his reaction to the move on social media. Perhaps the trifecta of settling his case with U.K. Anti-Doping, which had dragged on for two years, overcoming depression and regaining his license to box from the British Boxing Board softened the body blow of being relieved of a belt he had cherished, arguably even more than the sanctioning body trinkets he had taken from the Ukrainian.

As THE RING explained in its statement, the decision to remove the belt "was not taken lightly," and it will have been to some degree a source of succor for the 6-foot-9 fighter that a decision was taken not to install any of the three unbeaten beltholders – Anthony Joshua (IBF/WBA), Joseph Parker (WBO) or Deontay Wilder (WBC) – as the new incumbent.

Fury responded to the news by taking to Twitter: "Just like to thank the @ ringmagazine for being so patient with me over the last few years," he said. "This will be the first time since 1922 that the Ring magazine will split from the heavyweight lineage. Tyson Fury always setting precedents." Fury is currently in training ahead of his return and is targeting his next bout for April or May. If he can get anywhere near where he was, physically and mentally, in 2015, I believe Fury can still be a great challenge for any of the reigning champions.

VIRGIL HUNTER IS HIGH ON ADAMS, CAUTIOUS ON KHAN

You always get honesty with trainer Virgil Hunter. Brutal honesty. With Hunter in-person recently, he revealed to me that Amir Khan had told him the day after he fought Canelo Alvarez that he regretted taking the fight. They both knew Khan could ill afford a mistake in the fight, in which he was brutally knocked out in the fifth round. Khan is back now, with soaring popularity after a stint on a celebrity reality TV series in the U.K. in which he battled tasks involving snakes and spiders (which he fears much more than any man with gloves in a ring). Hunter, on Khan's comeback, is equally honest; he is unsure whether the former champion can hold a belt again: "You never can tell until he has his first fight coming back. I've always said that if he would have been into the sport mentally and physically, and this was his first and foremost priority, he would have been one of the greats. Because he has such ability. Does he have the opportunity to come back and do it? It's big odds. Only time will tell."

But on Nicola Adams, the GB double Olympic gold medalist, Hunter believes he has a gem: "She just brightens my day when she comes in. I think she wins a title before the year is out. She's getting more and more precise. She's just a dream to be around. I'm taking her down to 108 ... She's in a weight class a little too heavy for her. She'll start stopping girls at 108."

PROGRESS FOR FAWAZ

I reported in in a recent ATP column that Kelvin Bilal Fawaz, the London-based amateur boxer who has represented England, was threatened with deportation to Nigeria by the U.K. Home Office. Fawaz had been arrested by eight undercover officers at a boxing gym in London on November 29 for failing to report to an immigration center, after the Home Office had rejected several applications for citizenship and rights in a 11-year period. The news is that he has been released on bail from detention. He was held for 34 days. His team is now seeking a judicial review of his case. Cheers.

Gareth A Davies is Boxing Correspondent for The London Telegraph

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Pictured left to right: Damon Allen Jr., Jessie Vargas, Fernando Vargas

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